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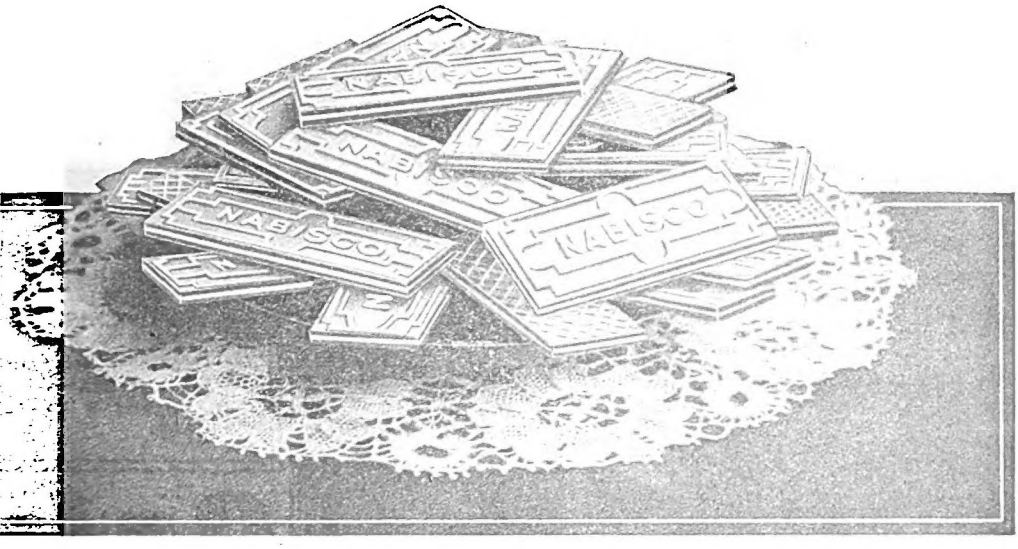

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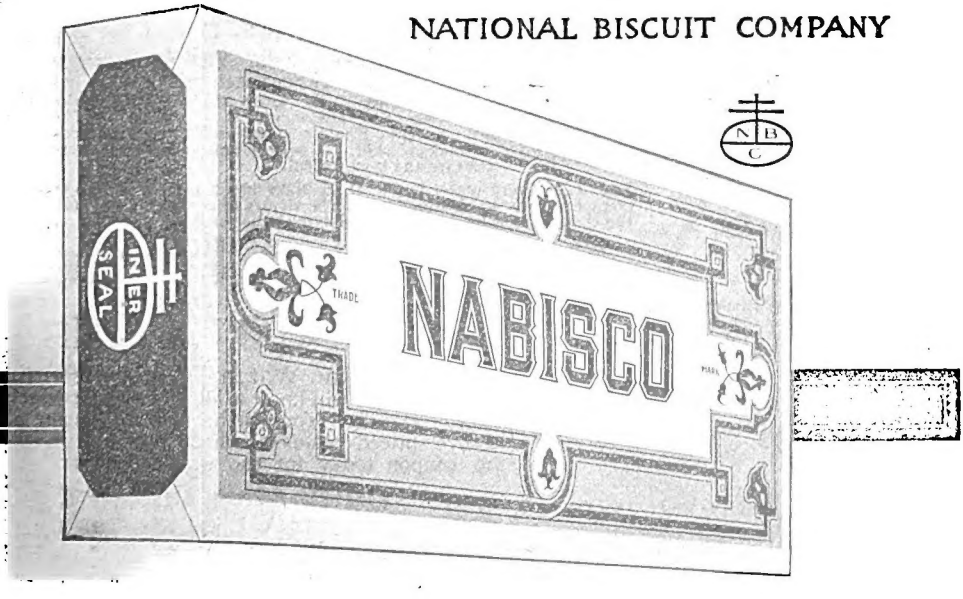

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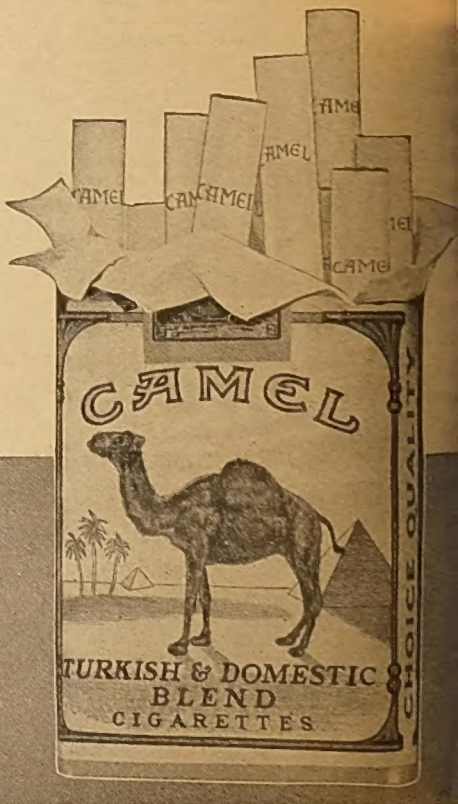

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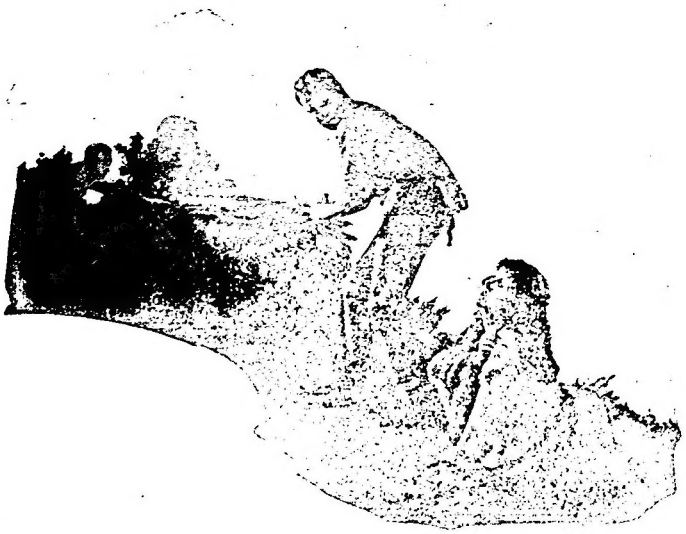

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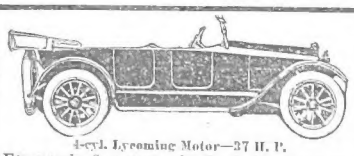

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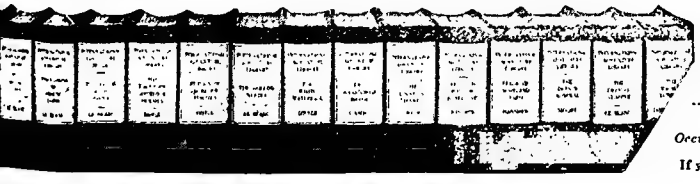

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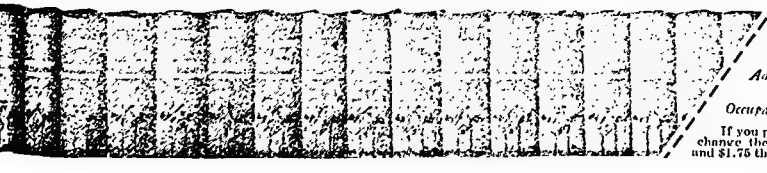

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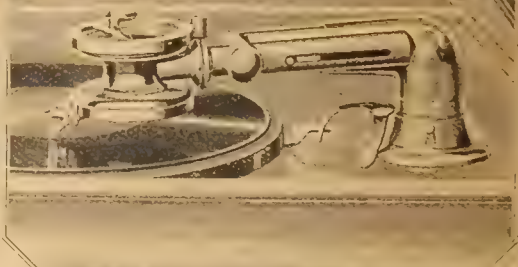

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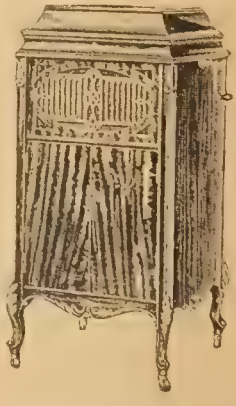

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CRAFTY and cunning was *Hakon Jarl—Hakon the Mighty* he was called—Norway's ruler in the tenth century. Foremost of his archers was *Einar—Einar the Thumb-Shaker*, so called because of the lightning speed with which he loosed arrow after arrow, striking his target with unerring accuracy. To *Hakon's* beautiful daughter, *Bergliot*, had *Einar* sworn that he would draw his bow only in defense of the weak and in furtherance of the right. Yet was he also sworn to serve the unscrupulous *Hakon*. "The Doom of the Gods," a complete novel by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur appearing in the next *Adventure*.

"WE TWAIN shall meet again, and that day will be the day of my death and thine." Thus spoke *Zari*, the most feared and most respected witch-doctor of all Rhodesia, to Symes, the commissioner of that district. Read the startling results of this prophesy in our next issue. "The Death of Zari," by L. Patrick Greene.

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Adventure
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VOL. XXIII. NO. 3
NOVEMBER 3 1919

Gentlemen of the North

A Four-Part Story

Part I.

by HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "Red Belts," "When Kentucky Starved," etc.

"BACK since ages at whose birth we can only guess, but which in all human probability go deeper into the past than the reign of Arab in Yemen, or Kirghis in Turkestan, the wild red man has roamed these wastes; back into that dark night which hangs forever over all we know or shall know of early America. The time before the white man came—what a measureless eternity lies hidden under the words! This prairie was here when the stones of the pyramids were unhewn and the site of Babylon was a river meadow—here as it is today, treeless, desolate and storm swept. But where and whence came the wild denizens of the waste? Fifty writers have broached their various theories, a hundred solutions have been offered. It has seemed to us when watching this strange wild hunter, this keen untutored scholar of nature, this human creature that sickens beneath our civilization and dies midst our prosperity—it has seemed to us that he was of a race older and more remote than our own, a stock coeval with a shadowy age—a remnant, perchance, of an earlier creation which has vanished from the earth, preserved here in these wilds—a waif flung up by the surge of time to these later ages of our own."—W. F. BUTLER, in "The Wild North Land."

CHAPTER I

THE ICE GOES OUT

A BROWN river rolling up from the south between banks of oak and willow and bois blanc, surrounded by the wet, steaming woods of April and flanked on the west by plains which climb higher and higher until they find the Rockies. A brown river bearing the trunks of mighty trees; a silent, sullen flood carpeted with dead buffaloes. This is the most persistent of all my pictures of the Red River of the North.

It is long since I have gazed upon it. Yet there is scarcely a day my thoughts do not travel back to some phase of it; to the time when the rivalry was at its height between the North West Company and our

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opponents, the X. Y. Company—Sir Alexander McKenzie's vehicle in fighting our arrogant Simon McTavish for the fur trade—and the indomitable Hudson's Bay Company, which was to swallow us all. Of all my recollections of cruel hardships and wild freedom, that view of the river in early April, 1804, left the deepest impress on me. This, partly because it was a symbol of the country's desolation and loneliness and savage hostility to us Northmen, partly because that April day proved to be the threshold to remarkable experiences, wherein I was to suffer much and find the great happiness.

When the spell is on me, which is often, the civilized horizon of the Northwest films over and again I behold the brown expanse of freshet waters hurrying with their gruesome toil to mingle with the Assiniboin at the Forks. No other river linked us Northmen so closely with the Sioux country in the South, that source of perpetual menace. The danger that might come down the river at any minute kept alive my interest in it and stimulated my imagination as I watched its muddy tide, choked with innumerable shaggy victims, sweeping by the Pembina River post of the N. W. Company. It was a bridge between the known perils of the Pembina country and the barbarity of the Adder People.

It was tingling to young blood to know a fate worse than death might be descending the river at any time. Let the Sioux war-parties range ever so wide of our domain, and yet, night and day, we felt their presence, we few Northmen and our Chippewas.

The slamming of a door to one of the men's huts outside the stockade at night became the discharge of a Sioux gun; a frightened mob would come hammering at the gate and frantically demanding admittance, old Tabashaw, the chief and thorough scoundrel, in the lead. A buffalo bull with a broken leg had been wounded by a Sioux; for days the hunters would hug the fort. Or the buffaloes stampeded, or large flocks of swans rose in alarm from the river above us; it was break open the gun cases and serve out powder and ball. The wind from the south brought smoke; only a Sioux fire could have made it. An old woman dreamed a Sioux warrior stuck his head in her hut and counted the men there; the children and women are hurried inside the stockade. Horsemen riding and raising a cloud of snow can only be Sioux warriors on a Winter path. Even Flat Mouth, chief of the Pillager band of Chippewas, young like myself, a very brave man and much traveled, has galloped to the fort after mistaking red deer in August for enemy horsemen.

Thus it went from day to night and then repeated. Always omens and signs to remind us of those ferocious people who gave no quarter and who would never forget it was the Chippewa Nation that prevented their holding a clear title to the headwaters of the Mississippi. Summer and Winter, with the new leaf and with the yellow, tobacco was passing between the Chippewas, Crees and Assiniboins for war against the Sioux. Never while I was in the country did the Northern Indians accomplish anything lasting. A sudden foray, a few scalps danced; that was about all.

Undoubtedly a subconscious fear of the Sioux was also responsible for the picture of the brown river in April. Some imaginative quality of reasoning, perhaps, interpreted the herds of drowned buffaloes as a symbol of the Sioux's power and remorselessness. When Nature has an opportunity for unlimited slaughter, she turns Sioux and kills on a tremendous scale.

Three seasons I heard the ice give and go out with the noise of many guns, wrenching earth and trees from the banks like some aquatic behemoth with claws many fathoms wide. The first time was at the Park River post above the Pembina; once from our outpost at the mouth of Reed River, ten miles below the Pembina. But never was I filled with such longing to follow the ice through the Forks and down the trail of lake and river to Superior as on that mild April day of 1804. It wasn't homesickness, for I was completing my third season as company clerk and had no ties back East to draw me. It was "Black" Chabot, *bourgeois*, or postmaster, who was serving in place of Mr. Alexander Henry, the man I came out with, who was now up the Saskatchewan on important business for the gentlemen of the North.

It's not boasting to say I felt no physical fear of Chabot, although he was an overgrown hulk of a man with an immense black beard. His savage ways left nothing for our Chippewas to teach him. But I did

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not fear him, for I could kill him as a last resort. It was the daily grind of having to associate with the brute that got on my nerves. The best of friends wear on each other at times when cooped up for a long Winter in close quarters; at his best Chabot was intolerable. For two months I had kept my hand on my skinning-knife whenever he approached me.

I hoped he would keep his beastly temper in check and never lay hands on me; for, did he do that, the Pembina would need a new master or a new clerk. The danger lay in his growing love for alcohol, thinly mixed with water—"high wine" the trade called it. When in drink, which was his normal condition, he was very variable in his moods, ranging from the caressing to the ferocious and always foul-mouthed. If he ever attacked me, I was determined not to cower like a sheep and be murdered, as I've known Chippewa squaws to die when their husbands were in a drunken fury. And, did one resist him, it must be to the limit; kill or be broken.

The post was well situated at the mouth of the Pembina, and opposite Peter Grant's old fort on the east bank of the Red, now in ruins, the first North West Company post established on the river. Below us grew large bois blanc, or whitewood, which we used for floorings. Between us and the western plains were the big oaks we had drawn on in constructing the buildings. From the Pembina to the Park the country was level and open, the only timber being along the banks of the Red. The Pembina site was discouraging enough when Mr. Henry and I looked it over. It was heaped high with fallen trees and the underbrush was so rank one couldn't see a dozen feet in any direction.

We soon remedied that, however. But the fairest spot on earth would become detestable if it had to contain Chabot and his drunken humors. He may have done big things for the N. W. when he was on the Assiniboin. Give the devil his due; he must have accomplished much to be appointed master at Pembina. It must have been that he traded his high wine instead of giving so much of it to himself. He had held himself in during the Fall, but the Winter had broken down all self-restraint. So I was keen to return East and ask for another position. I had committed myself to furthering the interests of Simon McTavish, of McTavish, Frobisher & Company.

The breath of the fur company had filled my lungs, and, although well educated for those days, I had no dreams of ever doing anything except to trade for buffalo robes and beaver. I had nursed ambitions. I desired to become a notable Northman. So the wild fowl, filling the sky, were no more eager to make their Northern homes than was I to make the Grand Portage and hasten on to Montreal and obtain a transfer.

NOW that the time was near for starting the skin canoes down the river it did not seem I could compose my soul in patience to await the great day. Strangely enough this approach of freedom suddenly caused me to fear that I and not Black Chabot might precipitate a tragedy. As I gazed on the woful waste of hides swirling by the post, I repeatedly vowed I would watch myself every minute and keep away from Chabot as much as possible. I even planned to leave ahead of him and the brigade, on the excuse it would be well for me to visit our station on the Scratching, where the X. Y. opposition also was established.

Red Dearness was the new master there, having arrived late in the Winter with Madame, his woman. He was a surly sort, I heard, something of a recluse. Fragments of gossip about his woman had her full-blood and quarter. It would never do for me to suggest the trip. Black Chabot must think it was his own idea and something of a hardship for me. I fancied I was intelligent enough to bring this about.

I thought of several different methods for planting the notion in his thick head as I idly watched the Indian women drag buffaloes to the bank. They were lifting the back fat and removing the tongues, leaving the rest to rot except for one or two which they cut up for their own use. We white men would not eat drowned buffalo, but the Chippewas were fond of it. The meat did appear to be all right, fresh and firm. Of course the women could secure only one or two out of each hundred huge bodies floating by. There were literally herds of the big brutes. Above and below our post every river was contributing its ghastly cargo. Thousands and thousands perished each season in crossing the ice. And this terrific waste had been going on

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for hundreds and probably thousands of years. In addition to the carcasses floating down-stream there were countless bodies lodged along the banks of the many rivers. Soon there would arise an awful stench, for there were not enough scavengers to cheat the hot sun.

On the plains as far as the eye could reach were living and dead buffalo. Bald eagles and crows and wolves were battening on the fallen. Our dogs chased those afoot that wandered near the fort. Many a a scabby old bull carried a crow on his back and displayed a furious temper under the implacable and continuous pecking. The beasts were a sad sight to look at now, lean and showing huge patches where their Winter coats had fallen out.

Back in February one of our hunters said he had found a calf frozen to death and declared it was a positive sign of an early Spring. At that time we were finishing two hundred cords in our four chimneys and were skeptical of such prophecies. Still, the season did break early, although for the life of me I never could understand why abnormally cold weather in February should forecast an early breaking up of the ice. For that matter the strong timber Indians have many signs and omens which come to nothing.

The town-bred would have found nothing but grim severity in the panorama. But I knew the ash-leaf maples were running and that the women were making sugar, and I felt the wind mild and mellow as it blew up from the south, promising a clear passage home even if it brought the reek of smoke which might mean the Sioux. The Summer birds and frogs unqualifiedly insisted it was Springtime and high time for one to desire to go somewhere.

In and outside the stockade the hunters were preparing their traps for the Spring hunt. Already the raccoons were beginning to leave their hollow trees during the daytime, and quite a few were being taken. That morning one of the Indians had brought in several wolf pups, tame and playful as kittens. He intended raising them for sled dogs. An important event was the arrival of two men with the Winter express from Portage La Prairie, bringing orders to Chabot and bearing other matters which must be taken without delay to Grand Portage.

How I longed to carry the express! With the season so early I knew I could make Sault Ste. Marie before June. Unfortunately Chabot was the master and after reading his orders he had stuffed them in his leather coat and lavishly treated the messengers to rum before sending them on their way. They were half drunk when they left and he continued drinking alone.

Short Arms came in howling over the death of a child, and he must have a keg of liquor to drive away his sorrow and some red cloth and vermilion to cover the body. Chabot had no excuse for getting the express drunk and thereby delaying the business of the gentlemen of the North, but of course it was necessary to give the rum to the Indian. With the English, as with the French before them and as it would be with the Americans in the South, liquor was the backbone of the fur trade.

It made it beastly disagreeable at times for any one inclined to be fastidious, but only high wine would bring in furs and skins for a surety. Even in Montreal, the heart of the Northern fur trade, I have heard people complain about the universal practice of trading rum for pelts. Substitute something else for rum and see how many packs of beaver go down the St. Lawrence.

I DO not suppose that that particular morning differed greatly from those that preceded it, yet it sticks in my memory like a burr to a bull because it was the beginning of a wonderful experience for me, the coming of something which was to affect my whole life and bring contentment out of a welter of great dangers. The details, even the trivial things, stand very clear cut. All things counted, it had been a busy morning. Old Tabashaw was drunk early and bawling some new medicine songs in an attempt to cure a young woman whose jealous husband had shot an arrow through her body. Those not employed in making their traps fit were playing their game of platter and pestering me for liquor.

Before pausing to watch the river I had overseen the making of the last of the pemmican, ninety pounds to a bag, fifty of beef and the rest in grease. I also had supervised the repairing and the gumming of the canoes. These had rested all Winter under thick covering of hay, their frames loosened, and they needed careful attention.

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I had pursued and caught Little Crane and made him give up pelts due us for debt. He was taking his hunt to the X. Y. post, angry because I had refused him an extra ration of rum.

When I halted him and insisted on his squaring his debt, the scoundrel tried to knife me, but a clout over the head with my strong club quickly brought him to his senses or, rather, knocked him senseless. My duty to my employers demanded I prevent the Crane from cheating us out of the debt and enriching "Red" Dearness, of the opposition.

I had small stomach for what immediately followed. Some women came in from the Pembina mountains, bringing a pack of prime beaver which they were taking to the X. Y. post on the Scratching to pay their men's debt. We had a hut in the mountains and a small assortment of goods to catch the Cree and Assiniboin as well as the Chippewa trade. Had there been any chance of honorably trading for the pack, our men would have done so. But the furs were already owed to the opposition. When Chabot learned of the women's presence and their intention of carrying their pack down-river, he raged and cursed the hill men for fools for ever letting the beaver get by them. Then he demanded the women give the furs to him and when they refused he fought them. They fought like wildcats, but he got the trade.

Such work was bound to make bad business for us, for the devil had been to pay ever since the X. Y. and the H. B. opposition came to the Red. During my three seasons there I had seen the Chippewas, Crees and Assiniboins spoiled. Each season they grew worse. If a man killed a few skins, we treated him as if he were a big chief. Almost all of them had scarlet coats. It was bad enough when we had to cater to old Tabashaw, the drunken nuisance, but when we had to coddle every hunter who made an ordinary hunt it was not only tedious but dangerous. If I punished a man for stealing supplies, he would go down to the Scratching to be petted up by Dearness. And we made much of those who came to us after being corrected at the X. Y. Of course, such conditions couldn't continually grow worse without our dead bodies being thrown into the Red to vary the monotony of drowned buffalo. And, having created such an evil situation, it was madness for Black Chabot to take skins from the native women by brute force.

ALL THIS and a dozen other tag ends of trouble were swimming through my mind as I watched the women drag the buffaloes ashore and tried to perfect my scheme for being sent on ahead to the Scratching.

When a great hubbub inside the stockade attracted my attention I took it for granted another jealous buck had knifed his wife or bitten off her nose, but a glance showed me Chabot's huge form and black whiskers, and the air seemed to be filled with wolf pups. The owner of the pups looked bad about the eyes but contented himself with grunting as he gathered his pets in a corner. Chabot, from sheer brutality, had halted on entering the gate to kick the little creatures out of his path. Now he swaggered up to me, looking very nasty. I dropped my hand over my knife and braced my feet.

His first words, bawled out so the whole post could hear, were—

"Found out yet who cut that hole through the back of the storehouse?"

This stock question was the barometer of his drams. Nearly three months before some Indian had cut a hole through the logs of the storehouse and by means of a gun-screw on the end of a stick had attempted to fish out some of our trade goods. Fortunately the screw had broken off at the first trial and had dropped inside, and we had lost nothing. When at the fighting peak of his drinking Chabot always brought this matter up, treating it as if it were a fresh crime and peculiarly within my province to solve. There was scarcely anything outside of personal abuse which he could have said that would have irritated as did this query.

In my exasperation I answered—

"I'll get a *wabeno* drum and go into a trance and maybe find out all about it."

Instantly I was sorry to have said it, for I remembered my fears of a flare-up at the last minute and my firm resolve to avoid it. And now I had invited a tragedy by my sarcasm.

"Franklin, that ain't the way to talk to me," he murmured. "As clerk you're supposed to keep track of the goods."

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Once more my good intentions flew away and I angrily rejoined:

"I can't keep track of anything stolen unless I steal it myself. Please remember that nothing was taken."

"I do remember," he snorted. "This post would go to —— if I didn't do most of the remembering. Why didn't you look for tracks?"

This was a fair sample of his drunken unreasonableness when he was primed to pick a quarrel. Now I was determined to hold myself in check and politely observed—

"Pardon me, but the dogs had raced back and forth through the snow and destroyed all signs before you and I could look the ground over."

"You've always got a —— of a good reason for not doing things," he murmured.

Once he lowered his voice it was time to look out for trouble. Twice within a minute he had spoken gently. I stepped back, pretending to be watching the sturgeon jumping in the river, but in reality to get elbow room as I toyed with the haft of my knife.

"When you going to finish that pemmican?" he softly asked.

"It's all finished," I said, gripping the knife-handle.

"Well, for God's sake, try to find something to do besides sight-seeing," he bellowed. The danger was past for the time and my hand dropped to my side. In his bull of Bashan voice he continued, "One of the men is just down from upriver with twenty beaver, six still in the meat, and you ought to be on hand to trade them. Give him a quart of that West Indies rum that's spoiled. The fools think it's French brandy. Tell him it's a present for getting skins while those other skunks do nothing but loaf. Shows what they can do if they want to. He's only been gone two days."

His idea of teaching the idlers the profits of industry caused me to smile as best I could do to keep a straight face, for the loafers were all drunk. He caught the smile, although I swallowed it fast enough, and added—

"After you've traded the skins I want to see you in my room." Low tone again, the danger signal.

I believe we had reached a point where something radical must happen. I could no longer gain anything by trying to avoid him, to dodge his vicious moods. The man who found the wolf pups and several others were watching us and listening. They furnished me my cue and, jerking my head toward them, I warned:

"You're spoiling your own trade when you talk this way to me. They're ready for mischief. The X. Y. has spoiled them."

My reference to the opposition caused him to forget me. With a howl of rage he began cursing Red Dearness and his woman. He had never seen the latter, yet he included her in his volley of invectives. He had met Red Dearness once at the mouth of Reed River and came within an inch of locking canoes and having it out to the death.

"I kicked White Partridge nearly to death after he stole my horse and went over there. When Dearness heard about it he made a chief out of the skunk. As soon as I can get the Indians off for the Summer hunt and the brigade under way I'm going to have a settlement with that red hound."

"That will mean the two posts will fight it out with the Indians waiting to kill off the survivors. Then the H. B. will have a clear field. Dearness is new down here, but from what I hear you don't want to start blazing a trail toward him unless you're willing to finish it. I don't see as he has done any worse than you have. He'll probably have something to say about your taking the skins from the women."

Instead of increasing his rage this frank speech set him to chuckling heavily. He was remembering his coup against the X. Y.

"The Arrer's woman tried to cut my throat," he guffawed. "He'd sell her to me for a nine-gallon keg."

"If he does, she'll cut your throat in earnest," I warned. "But to get back to me; when the Indians see I am treated with disrespect, they'll decide you can be treated the same way."

"Pooh! I'll break the back of the first dirty buck that looks at me squint-eyed," he bellowed.

"Hurt one and you hurt every Chippewa in the Northwest. Next Fall we'll find they've been passing tobacco to wipe us out."

This statement jolted him and he stared at me steadily for half a minute and began plucking at his long beard. He was half drunk and wanted to deride my warning.

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wever, there was a streak of fear in his ke-up. He tried to laugh and carried off poorly, for in the midst of a guffaw happened to catch the scowling gaze of wolf-hunter and grew very sober.

"Never mind about the beaver pelts. I'll down and trade them," he mumbled. ld Tabashaw has been telling the men has a new medicine and can make rum d iron arrers."

"He's bad," I gravely agreed. "The ar I was at the Park post we gave him a ew Year's treat of rum, flour and sugar, d he paid us by trying to bribe our hunter leave us, so we would have to pay more r our meat. We were giving the hunter tty skins, cloth for his wife and all his nmunition too. Trouble with him is ir giving his men too many red coats. hen he alone had a red coat and a red ather for his hair, he felt he was chief. ow all his men feel as big as he does. e knows his power over the tribe is slip- ing and he wants to get it back. He's aking ready for the Grand Medicine remony. After that's over and they egin making the *wabeno*, he'll spring some ew tricks. That's why he plays his new rum so much. Black Robe told his oman yesterday that the chief can kill ny man, red or white, by just wishing im to die."

"The —— poisoners!" grunted Chabot, inding up with a little shiver. "He's at t now, the murderer!"

He referred to the monotonous thudding f the new drum, accompanying the chief's owling voice in more *wabeno* songs. The chief had pretended to extract a piece f metal from the wounded woman's side nd had collected a big kettle and two lankets from the husband. Now he was eeking another piece of metal in her neck, or which he would be generously paid.

The fact that the arrow had left no foreign substance in the wound did not impair the husband's credulity. The more fragments of iron the old rascal could pretend to draw from the poor body the greater his reputation as a medicine man. His voice rose above the noise made by the dogs, the women and the children. Chabot had heard him throughout the morning without paying any heed. Indian howling and drumming and fighting was a background we were used to, just as we were used to the song of the river and never heard it unless we stopped and deliberately listened.

Now, because of my words, the chief's song had a new significance. In it Chabot was finding a threat against his life. Although I was glad to have diverted his attention from me, I began to regret having mentioned poison. It would never do for him to show he was afraid. We were but a handful of white men possessing treasure the natives yearned for—rum. We were surrounded by one of the largest tribes on the continent, a people numerous and brave enough to drive the Sioux south. We held our place at the top of the heap only by holding our heads high and forcing the impression that we belonged there.

I had often traveled alone to the Pembina Mountains and all through the Reed and Red Lake Rivers districts and up the Red far beyond Grandes Fourches, in seeking Indian families to kill skins for us. But with the exception of eccentric attacks by drunken men I had never been in actual danger. There had been many times, however, when my scalp would have dried in smoke over a tent-pole had I shown the white feather. There was only one Indian along the whole river in whom I put any trust. It was a whimsical truth that this exception should be Flat Mouth, a chief of the greatest band of robbers in the whole Chippewa nation. So it was with lively concern that I watched the changing expression in Chabot's eyes and feared that his face under the heavy beard was developing lines of weakness.

"The only thing to do is to be firm with them," I remarked.

"Yes, yes. Of course. We must be firm," he muttered, trying to frown at the wolf-hunter. Then with a shrug of his powerful shoulders he said, "We'll be getting out pretty soon. Very soon."

"Not for a month at the quickest," I reminded.

"As soon as I can settle their accounts and hire the Summer men, the brigade starts," he sullenly replied.

"But the X. Y. and the H. B. canoes won't start till sometime in May," I protested.

"They can start when they please and be —— to them," he growled. "The brigade from this post pulls out when I give the word. I shall have the packs made up very soon."

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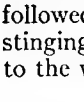
This was a startling announcement. I was keen enough to go down the river, but a premature departure would cause a commotion among the company heads. However, I did not believe he could complete his arangements for the Summer men as speedily as he intimated.

"If we go out before everything is caught up, the opposition will steal our trade and our hunters," I was reminding, when a shot from the plains side of the stockade, quickly followed by excited whoops, saved me a stinging rebuke and sent him hastening to the window.



IT WAS nothing out of the ordinary. Prior to our conversation Chabot would have thought nothing of it. Now he looked apprehensively from the window, sighed in great relief, and allowed his face to twist with mirth. He shouted boisterously and clapped his hands. One would have thought it a great feat. A scraggy bull that had lost its sight in some recent prairie fire had wandered near the stockade. A hunter had fired a ball into its side.

Now the poor brute was running wildly about, colliding with trees and stumps, pursued and tormented by half a dozen Indians. Blind buffaloes were a very common sight, especially in the late Fall when the plains burn in large areas until extinguished by heavy snow or prolonged rains. With all their hair burned off and their skin shriveled up they prompt a humane man to end their misery with a ball. But this spectacle was sickening and I wasn't over fastidious. I turned to get my gun and end the miserable sport but was anticipated by a buck, who ran in and leaped on the brute's back, then to his side and dispatched him with an ax.

Thrusting his head from the window, Chabot applauded in a stentorian voice.

"Well done, Mauvaise Hache! Good work! Come inside and have some new milk (rum)!"

It was nauseating. Rewarding an idler's attack on a blind bull as if he had penetrated deep beyond the old Sioux war-road and had brought back a dozen packs of prime furs to trade. The unexpected invitation not only brought Bad Ax, proudly flourishing his bloody weapon, but all the others, whom I had refused during the morning while Chabot was drinking with the express. I went down with him and, to make matters worse, he drank with them. The condescension of the fool was disgusting. Once you drink with a man whom you wish to feel your inferior he will proclaim himself your equal. To watch him pour the rum and pat Bad Ax on the shoulder and bellow out praise would make one think the lazy dog had brought in ten tents of his people, all heavily loaded with trade. The owner of the wolf pups edged toward the master and I stepped to his side and made sure his hands were empty and no knife was in his clout.

Chabot no sooner glimpsed him than he eagerly extended a brimming mug. The fellow snatched it, his little eyes flickering like a snake's, and vague wonderment at his luck, at the meaning of it all, showed in his heavy face. While they were guzzling their first dram old Tabashaw sniffed the air and threw aside his drum and staggered into the room, loudly proclaiming:

"New milk! Give it to me! It gives a good taste to the smoke. Let us have plenty of new milk so the children won't cry!"

I wanted to cuff the old vagabond's ears until he couldn't hear the last trump, for his drunken speech contained a most vicious threat. It was the same as if he had said we would all be killed if he was refused a drink, thereby leaving our children to mourn. An hour before Chabot would have kicked him back to his damnable drumming, garnishing his flight with a volley of curses. Now he actually grinned and poured him a mug of "wine."

During our first season on the river we could dilute a quart of river water with a gill of alcohol and trade it for six prime beaver skins. I've traded a three-point blanket and a nine-gallon keg of high wine, highly diluted, for a hundred and twenty-five beaver; less than fifteen dollars' worth of stuff for more than four hundred dollars' worth of skins, Halifax currency. But our Indians would no longer stand so much water and the profits were a bit less. Now their milk must be strong. It was; the effects were speedy.

Old Tabashaw howled out another poorly veiled threat by saying a hunter had found a sign that meant the destruction of the post and all the white men on the river. He referred to a badger that had chased a

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skunk into a hollow stump and had been caught in a trap hidden there. This prophecy was bound to have an evil effect, yet Chabot made no move to counteract it. So I grabbed the old villain by the throat with one hand and snatched Bad Ax's weapon with the other and, as he crashed over backward with me on top, I loudly promised to leave his hair and brains sticking to the floor unless he explained what he meant by such talk. He wasn't so drunk but what he could be cunning, and he protested:

"The Sioux will come. But the Chippewas will die fighting for their white friends."

I accepted this amendment, having scored my point of showing the men we would stand no nonsense; only it should have been Black Chabot and not a subordinate who took action. A year before, when Mr. Henry was at the post, Tabashaw had started much the same kind of talk as a preface for a general massacre. But Mr. Henry had taken the notion out of him before he could barely begin.

Chabot looked troubled but did not upbraid me; nor did he rebuke the Indians. With the chief silenced the effects of the drink returned to its usual ruts. A young buck decided his woman was unfaithful and stabbed her in the knee as she was stealing a drink out of his mug. And he would have done for her had I not nearly brained him with a stool. It was not my place, however, to keep the men from murdering each other. Even had the master been absent, it would not have been customary to interfere with their drinking beyond driving them clear of the fort.

TO BE rid of the scene I went for my horse to ride out on the plains to try my new double-barrel gun on the buffalo. The horse came from the Mandans and was a noble buffalo horse. He was crazy for the hunt, but I quickly found my heart was not in the sport. He repeatedly ran me along beside bull or cow and waited for me to shoot, while the only ambition I could entertain was to follow the river north, to get clear of Chabot.

The sun was screened off by clouds of pigeons and the earth was cluttered with buffaloes; I did not fire a single shot, although I rode several miles from the fort. I was so absent minded that I kept but little reckoning of my wanderings until my mount halted beside a calf. It was lying down and hiding its head in the grass after its silly fashion. It had followed its mother until tired out.

As I was mounted it was not afraid of me but staggered to its shaky legs and would have followed my horse back inside the stockade had not its mother at that moment come tearing back to the rescue. My horse raced me into a desirable position. But we had buffalo enough and our stock of frozen meat was thawing and spoiling. So I galloped away and left the calf to be consoled by the mother until the river or an arrow measured out its destiny.

On my return to the fort I found the place in an uproar, the women now having procured rum and adding their jealousies and whimsies to the general confusion. As I entered, Tabashaw, in an exuberance of ferocity, threw his drum from him and trampled upon it and smashed it and loudly proclaimed that thus would he stamp out all white men. The Indians were overrunning the place. A few years before there had been no stockades about the forts in the Northwest, and the red nuisances came and went as they would. When Mr. Henry built the stockade round the Park River post they had been very wrathy until we made them believe the barrier was intended to keep out the Sioux. The Lord knows we had gone through enough in teaching them their place without letting down the bars now. Chabot was not to be seen, but the bucks and the women were everywhere and several boys were openly fighting over sugar one of them had filched.

I came just in time to witness the climax of one family row. Old Crow's young wife had resented his trying to disfigure her for life by burning her rather comely features with a brand from the fireplace and was leaving him. The old devil pursued her through the gate to make her leave their boy with him. The child, not more than seven or eight, guarded his mother's retreat with great sportsmanship by shooting several arrows at his father. The bow was small and the arrows were not sent with much force, but one did wound the old sot in the cheek, whereat the youngster claimed a coup and yelled like a young demon.

The sight of the savages swarming over

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our quarters, handling and appropriating our effects, maddened me. Mr. Henry had been stern in Indian discipline. What I beheld was a prelude to a massacre. Unless the license was immediately squelched every white man on the river would fight for his life and most likely lose it. I grabbed a tent-pole and began swinging it in a circle, bringing them down in rows, regardless of sex. Those who could not crawl out were thrown out. As Tabashaw beheld his people making this unceremonious exit he reasserted himself and called for volunteers to capture the fort and make an end of the white men.

"We will kill them all and trade the furs at the Scratching post for new milk!" he yelled.

His speech appealed to their drunken minds. One man, who had been dancing wildly before the stockade gate, waving his ax and calling the Sioux "old women" and defying them to come out of the plains and give him battle, turned around and threw the ax at me. I had my gun and my first instinct was to shoot. But the man was crazy, the others were crazy, and the lesson would be lost. An Indian in rum never profits by an object lesson. So I stood on my guard, watching out for axes or arrows, and called over my shoulder to Chabot. Apparently the test had come and the long threatened uprising was about to be a fact. Chabot heard me, or else he happened to be appearing on the scene, for I heard his heavy step behind me as I faced the infuriated Indians.

"Kill them all! Kill old Black Face!" incited Tabashaw.

Chabot's countenance, despite his beard, betrayed a great fear, and yet it was not the Chippewas he feared. For without seeming to sense the climax now thrust upon us he passed by me and descended among the gesticulating figures. Buffeting them aside and walking like a blind man feeling his way, he advanced to the stockade gate and closed it and dropped the bar in place without a hand being raised against him. Whether his bold action took them so by surprize as to leave them incapable of hostile action, or whether they were so drunk as not to realize the master of the post was in their power, I can't say. Anyway, he gained the gate and then turned back, but now he made the mistake of trying to run.

Instantly they became galvanized into venomous activity and only their bloodthirsty eagerness saved him. They crowded so closely about him they could not wield their weapons effectively. Chabot continued oblivious to their purpose. I raised my gun, trying to decide just where the two barrels would do the most good, when the master found his voice. Raising both arms and throwing back his big head, he roared out:

"The Sioux! The Sioux are upon us!"

THERE was nothing so likely to sober the Chippewas as this alarm. Although remaining very drunk in the body their minds reacted mechanically at the dread words and their hostility to us instantly vanished. Old Tabashaw clawed at Chabot's arm and pleaded for protection. Many times I had believed the Sioux were upon us in force, but never had I betrayed my fears. Let the master show concern and the natives become worthless. They will leave a stout stockade that can defy several hundred Sioux and scatter helter-skelter to the woods to be run down and slaughtered. Chabot's wild outcry threw them into a terrible panic, and they raised a tremendous clamor. These were the very men who another day would pass war tobacco and penetrate deep into the Sioux country and seek desperate odds.

It was always thus, one side attacking, one giving away; seldom did two forces grow brave at the same time. Therein they differed from white men. They required a show of weakness to arouse their courage; then they could be quite terrific.

Old Crow's runaway wife and child now returned to the gate and began pounding it and screaming to be admitted. They could see no foe, but from their noise one would think the devil was within a rod of them.

Jumping down into the mob, I caught Chabot by the arm and dragged him into the door, demanding—

"What have you seen?"

He eyed me wildly, as if not recognizing me. It was not until I had him over the threshold and had shaken him smartly did he find his voice.

"The hills is full of their smokes!" he bellowed.

I ran to a rear window and looked to the

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west. Only the buffaloes and their ghostly trailers, the gray wolves, were on the plain. Smoke was crawling high in the direction of the Pembina Mountains. But it was nothing unusual at this time of year. Beaver hunters, about to return, invariably made a smoke to announce their coming. I told Chabot as much, but he insisted the smoke was made by our inveterate enemy; and he began breaking open the gun cases. Some of the raccoon hunters now arrived from the woods and joined Old Crow's wife and child in demanding admittance, one of them frenziedly trying to chop a hole through the gate. Those inside were crowding and pushing against the gate in an attempt to get out. Hell was loose.

I left Chabot working over the gun cases and fought my way to the gate and removed the bar, then battled until it had space to swing open. In rushed the hunters; outward surged those already inside. The impact of the two opposing bodies brought the entire group to a standstill for a moment. Placing my hands on the shoulders of two bucks, I raised myself above their heads and harangued them, saying:

"What is the matter with you? Are you all old women? Does a little smoke scare you? Where is Flat Mouth? He isn't a coward."

Old Tabashaw began babbling the omen of the skunk chased by the badger. The woman who had dreamed of a Sioux warrior counting the men in the Chippewa tents shrilly added her prophecy. Then, to my relief, Flat Mouth came running from the river. He was the only composed one in the lot. Pointing to the smoke and then to my horse outside the gate, I explained the situation and asked him to ride out on the plains and learn the truth. Without a word he leaped on the horse and dashed away, riding straight for the signal.

His prompt readiness to investigate tended to calm the others and they intelligently commenced preparations for our defense. In about an hour Flat Mouth came galloping back. We opened the gate, but he dismounted outside and entered leisurely, announcing:

"Beaver smokes. Some Crees and Assiniboins are coming with the hut people from the hills, bringing their trade here instead of leaving it at the hut."

At once the Chippewas were hysterical with joy and they danced and clapped their hands and proclaimed their intentions of exchanging tobacco with the newcomers and arranging for a big war party against the Sioux. As changeable as children, they were now lusting to go seek the enemy.

I took Flat Mouth aside to satisfy myself his information was correct. He was sure, he said. Although he had seen the hill party at a considerable distance he had recognized the carts used by our three men in taking trade goods to the hill hut. Being freed from a Sioux menace did not leave me altogether happy, however. It meant another kind of unpleasantness, that was all. The new trade being brought in would call for more drinking; when the Crees and Assiniboins have a drinking match with their friends the Chippewas it's high time to hide all weapons.

Going inside, I told Chabot what the Pillager had learned. He quit the gun-cases and in his usual bluster went to the door and berated the Indians for being cowards. Returning to me, he fumbled inside his leather coat and finally fished out a dispatch, brought by the express, and informed:

"I have orders to send you to the X. Y. post on the Scratching. You are to make a bargain with Red Dearness to the effect that neither the X. Y. nor the N. W. shall send out any men to drum up trade. The N. W. is anxious to agree not to accept any trade unless it's brought in to a post. When the brigade goes out, I will see the H. B. factor myself and strike a similar bargain."

"When does the brigade start?"

"I don't know," he evaded, lowering his eyes. "But you are to start tomorrow."

"I shall want a man to go with me."

"Take old Tabashaw and drown him and I'll give you a pack of beaver," he gritted. "I'll give him a hundred drops of laudanum in his next dram and see if that will stop his yawp. Take who you want to."

I picked Flat Mouth. The trip I had secretly planned was now an open path for me without my having said a word. Inwardly I rejoiced and was impatient for the morning to come. Only I wished I knew more about Chabot's plans for going down the river. I was intensely loyal to the N. W. and hoped he had changed his mind about a too early departure.

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CHAPTER II

THE BRIGADE GOES OUT

EARLY next morning a Red Sucker band of Indians came in with their families from Turtle River above us, where they had wintered. They brought sixty beaver, a bale of fox, another of wolf, a few fisher and two martens; also a skin canoe loaded with bear fat, melted the Fall before and poured into bags of red deerskin. They had quite a quantity of pemmican, which had spoiled because their fear of the Sioux had prevented their taking the ordinary precautions to dry out the skin canoe at least once in each twenty-four hours. The skin canoe is made of raw buffalo hides stretched over a willow frame with the hair inside. It will carry a heavy load but is no good except for floating down-stream. Unless emptied and dried over a fire or by the sun once a day, it becomes waterlogged and will sink.

One of the party had found a buffalo with a broken leg. Although their own people frequently wounded buffalo, which escaped, they took it for granted this creature had been hunted by the Sioux. They had precipitately decamped, leaving their sugar making, driven by fear to make the post. They did not dare stop and dry the big canoe until it began to settle. Before they could unload, the pemmican was soaked.

Like excited children telling some tremendous bear story they described the Sioux signs. Had we not already passed through a siege of nerves the day before their recital would have had our Indians badly frightened. As it was, their alarm fell on deaf ears. No one showed any interest in them until one of the band informed Chabot he had killed a big grizzly and must have rum to appease the spirit of the slain monster, also half a yard of red cloth to hang up as an additional conciliation.

This request, like the demand for rum to wash out grief over the dead, was reasonable. There are times when it is imperative the Indian should receive free rum rations, such as when his deepest superstitions are involved. I measured out the drink and the post idlers immediately began begging an allowance from the newcomers. Old Tabashaw, who had withstood a hundred drops of laudanum given in five doses spread over an hour, was very wide awake and urging the Red Suckers to take war tobacco with them to their Summer home on the Grand Passage on the Assiniboin for distribution among the Crees. The drinking bout promptly started, but there was no danger of the men repeating yesterday's performance, as they were still afraid of the Sioux and when the shadow was over them they could be quiet enough in their drams. The Red Sucker band as hunters was worth all the Chippewas on the Lower Red, although Tabashaw's men were keen enough for fur during my first season in the department.

I found Flat Mouth at the river ready to push off my canoe. Chabot came running after me, calling out—

"Stop at the Reed and tell Probos to take his packs to our Scratching post at once!"

"Yes, sir. But if there is a chance of the brigade going out at once, I would like to know it, as I have some stuff of my own I want to pack up," I replied.

"Oh, you'll have plenty of time to do that," assured Chabot.

My errand appealed to me aside from affording me a vacation. I was curious to meet Red Dearness. Chabot had given a garbled description of him, likening him to a red ape. But they had met only the once and, as Dearness had accused my superior of sending trappers to encroach on the X. Y. line and they had come near to fighting, which must have meant death for one, if not both, I took but little stock in the master's account.

Flat Mouth had seen much of the man when he was on the upper Saskatchewan and I questioned him for details. The Pillager briefly informed me that Dearness' whiskers were fully as long as Chabot's and a vivid red, hence his nickname.

"His woman? What tribe did he take her from?"

He stared ahead at the brown current and did not seem to hear me. I repeated my query and he shook his head. Beyond his description of the man's beard, I could get nothing from him. His silence, however, and his way of speaking gave the impression he stood in awe of Dearness. The color of the man's beard might account for this, the Indian's love for red amounting to reverence.

Without incident we covered the ten miles to the mouth of the Reed and hunted up

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s camp on the north bank. Neither he or any of his Indians was to be seen. lat Mouth said he was up at Reed Lake ter sturgeon. As the lake is surrounded y a half-mile belt of swamp grass and eds, I had no desire to search for him. nce I had tried to follow an old Indian id French path from this patch of water Lake of the Woods, but I soon decided ie roundabout way was the quickest. or taking out packs it was the only route. ot being disposed to enter the marshy ountry, I made myself comfortable in the mp and sent the Pillager on discovery. a short time he returned with Probos id several Indians, the latter clamoring r "milk." I gave them all a few inches tobacco, delivered Chabot's orders to ie clerk and resumed my journey.

After leaving the Reed we came upon five ears drinking at the river. I nearly broke lat Mouth's heart by refusing to stop hile he shot them. The fur was excellent t this season and a few pelts were not to e despised, but there was something in the ack of my mind that impelled me to finish ıy business and return to the Pembina. 'wenty-four hours since I had been desrate to quit the post; now I was keen to eturn. I couldn't get rid of the notion hat the brigade might start before I was eady to accompany it.

However, I cheered my red friend by reminding him that bear was plenty about the 'embina if an Indian would forget the ioux and go after them. He proclaimed is willingness to go, even to the thickly ooded country of the Cheyenne just south f Devil's Lake, where, he declared, the rizzlies went in vast droves and the region nust verily be the abode of the great bear *nanito*. The explanation for this abunlance of bears was simple enough, as that egion was the disputed northern boundary f the Sioux hunting range.

Any Indian venturing there in Summer vas pretty sure to remain while his hair raveled south. As there was no hunting o prevent the brutes from multiplying apidly, I suppose they did thrive in enormous numbers. Flat Mouth was pleased with my reasoning, as it gave him a new viewpoint and inflamed him to go there. Heretofore, he said, he had kept away because of the great bear spirit. But if all he had to fear was the Sioux and almost certain death, he was keen for the trip. He measured up higher in courage than any other redskin I ever met.

For miles we swapped bear talk. He entertained me by describing the difference in the habits of grizzlies within so narrow an area as contained between the Red River and the Pembina Mountains. I have no reason for doubting his statement that in the hills, where the soil is dry and sandy, with the frost seldom penetrating more than a foot, the bears, both grizzly and black, den up in the ground. Our Red River bears took to hollow trees. Flat Mouth said they did this because the bear *manito* had taught them how the frost sinks into the muddy banks for more than four feet; therefore they imitated the raccoons.

I had never gone after bear in the hills, but before Chabot took over the post one of the men brought me a cub which in a way bore out the Pillager's words. The cub was as tame as a kitten and trotted after me even when I quit the fort and took to the woods. When cold weather came I had the men open up a big hollow tree near the stockade and chop up some boughs and put inside so he might be unusually cosy. The place was almost snug enough for a human being. It measured six feet across, with a two-foot shell to keep out the cold. But the cub promptly showed his hills instinct by refusing the nest and insisting on digging a hole to live in. I never saw him after he retired for the Winter, but I suppose he was frozen out and took to the hills.

With stories and wood lore we beguiled the passage down. Flat Mouth talked glibly enough unless you touched upon something that was tabu. Finally we came to the Scratching, where our small post was in charge of a fellow called Desset. On the opposite side, hidden by a grove of strong woods, was the opposition post. When some distance above the post we could catch the din made by the Indians as they swallowed all the profits of their Spring hunt; men, women and children all getting drunk as rapidly as possible.

IT'S nasty work, peddling rum to Indians. But, after theorizing and sermonizing from Montreal to the Rocky Mountain House on the McKenzie, let some of the sanctimonious critics give out heavy debts to a race that believes successful thieving is a greater honor even

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than scalp-taking, and then let them see how they'll get the debts paid without rum.

To rob a trader, kill him if need be, but get his goods at any costs, would be a great coup if not for the knowledge such treatment would cut off the supplies. There was hardly an Indian in the Northwest who would not cheerfully have cut my throat for a keg of rum, if he knew it was the only keg in the world and that there could never be any more. My friend and companion was proud to call himself chief of the Pillagers-Thieves. The name wasn't given him by outsiders but was bestowed by his own people upon themselves.

After all, thievery among the Indians is only another name for looking out for one's best interests; a characteristic of the white man also. A man may take many scalps and count many coups, but the really valuable man in a tribe is he who can fetch home the most stolen horses. If getting what they want above all else—high wine—results in their women being sold and debauched, that is much their own business, not the trader's.

As we drew nearer the rival posts the hooting and singing seemed to emanate impartially from both banks and I deduced it had been going on all night. No one was down at the river when we grounded our canoe. Leaving Flat Mouth to stay with the canoe, I went up to the fort to interview Desset, the clerk. I found most of our people sick, as they were every Spring when they shifted from meat to fat sturgeon.

The Indians, too, seemed to be bad off, men, women and children coughing, several being far gone with consumption. Desset obviously had been generous with the "milk," as all the Chippewas were drunk. To add to the hubbub was the Indians' excitement at having found that morning a Canada lynx in a sturgeon net some ten feet from the shore.

Desset had endeavored to explain that the cat broke through while trying to cross the thin ice, which forms every night only to float out at midday, and had become tangled in the net and drowned. But nothing so simple as that could content a Chippewa when he could read so many signs from the curious happening. Optimistic from liquor, they read the sign favorably. The sturgeon net was the Chippewa Nation. Some of the hunters at the post were of the sturgeon gens. The lynx, of course, was a symbol for the Sioux. The Chippewa were to exterminate the Sioux. Not a shadow of a doubt about it in their minds, and already plans were perfected for sending the glad news and war-tobacco far up the Assiniboin. Had the Sioux appeared at that time in battle array, the Chippewas, firm in their faith, would have given them a terrible beating.

Desset had no control over them and spent most of his time in keeping out of the way. Several bore bloody wounds. As it wasn't my place to discipline Desset's Indians, I withdrew to a cubby-hole that served as an office and sought information concerning Red Dearness before crossing the river.

"He never comes here. He doesn't want me to go there. I never see him, only when he passes up the river or rides on the plains. Until the snow melted, I saw nothing of him or the Madame."

"What kind of a looking woman is she?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders, explaining:

"The few times I've seen her was when she was at a distance. Then she wore a capote. I've heard she's a Slave, also a Cree. I know she isn't Chippewa, or our hunters would be going over there for rum. They're afraid of Dearness and don't bother him after the first time."

We talked for some time and I read the fellow pretty thoroughly. He may have been a good office hand in Montreal, but he was sadly out of tune on the Lower Red. Theoretically he understood the business of buying furs. I could see that if all Indians were exactly alike he could learn the technique. Inasmuch as they were individuals, he was helpless. His babbling revealed that much.

It was Chabot who got him the post, and I should have disliked him because of his patron had he been less inoffensive and helpless. He confessed he had but few furs and that it wouldn't take him long to make up his packs once he knew the brigade was going out. In pity for the poor fool I offered to go over his books and make sure his accounts were straight.

"That's the worst of it," he bitterly took on. "The Indians were all drunk in here a few weeks ago and threw my books on the fire. I haven't even an account showing their debts."

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As he confessed this I detected him slyly watching me to read the effect of his announcement. My pitying contempt suddenly evaporated and in its place I felt a strong aversion to him. He seemed to be so weak, physically and mentally, I might have bothered much to help him out. Now I wondered if it wasn't a part of Chabot's scheme in getting him there to have the books disappear. The Pembina post would show fat returns. The Scratching post would mark up a loss. If Desset was discharged it needn't follow that anything criminal would be suspected. With the books gone and nothing but mismanagement proven it would be possible for him and Chabot to share a fat profit out of the past season, one which would make our gentlemen of the North tear their hair did they guess they were being bilked. These suspicions came to me because I believed Chabot to be a bad one and because of the furtive glances Desset gave me.

I talked some further with him and then went outside to visit the X. Y. On my way to the river I met Joe Pouliot, one of the best men the N. W. employed, and in a bantering way he made the boast he had brought in two hundred prime skins from one *derouine*. This, if true, was the most successful *derouine* ever made on the river.

I encouraged him to give me the details, which he did eagerly; and when he had finished I believed him. Now a *derouine*—the sending of men forth to scare up trade among the Indians instead of having them bring their hunt to the posts—was generally frowned upon by rival companies. It smacked of free trading, the great sin in a company's eyes. It tended to take the control of the fur business out of the companies' hands, besides encouraging the men to do a little sly trading for themselves or to carry part of the skins to some rival.

Futhermore, it was disastrous because it petted up the Indians until they were too lazy even to send their packs in by their women. Now the point was this: Why, if the N. W. post on the Scratching was securing any such number of skins in this fashion, should Black Chabot be eager to strike a bargain with Red Dearness, of the X. Y., to suppress the practise?

Desset was paid a hundred a year, Halifax currency, five hundred dollars in States' money. I had pitied him for a weakling. I quickly revised my opinion when further questioning brought forth the information from Joe that the season had been a good one.

"You don't seem to have much for the brigade to pick up," I remarked.

"But we sent out twenty-six packages of ninety pounds each right after the express stopped here," said Joe.

"How was the express? Pretty drunk?" I asked.

He smiled gently, caressed his long fair mustaches as if wiping off the dew of a drink and replied:

"They was asleep when our Indians saw their canoe drifting sidewise. They woke up after we got them into the post and held a dram of rum under their noses. We sent two Indians to look after them until they got through the swift water below. After that they'd be all right to look after themselves."

It was transparent. Desset and Chabot had traded for a canoe-load of prime furs and had sent them on ahead of the brigade, consigned to some one other than Simon McTavish's company. Indian troubles, a general failure to pay their debts, the loss of the account books, would be cited to cover the empty shelves.

I wasn't hired to spy on the Scratching River outfit. If Mr. Henry should return, I would tell him what I suspected, give the facts and leave the rest to him. But the N. W. had seen fit to put Chabot in Mr. Henry's place. I would hold my tongue.

LEAVING Flat Mouth behind, I took the canoe and paddled into the mouth of the Scratching and crossed over. I landed in a willow growth so thick and stout I would not have attempted to penetrate it if not for a narrow path making down to the water's edge. On the rising ground back of this was a second growth of very big oak, elm and ash. Cutting through the strong timber, I came out on a meadow that reached nearly to the Red. As I entered the meadow I beheld an old acquaintance, and he was having trouble with his horse.

It was the "Rat," French, with a dash of Chippewa. He had worked for us during Mr. Henry's first season on the Red and was thoroughly untrustworthy. After we turned him off he had joined the X. Y. as an interpreter. When we came

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to the Red, there were practically no horses on the river, although the Chippewas were constantly fighting the Sioux who had many. During the last two years we had increased our number of animals so that it was common enough sight to see the Indians mounted. Besides those we and the opposition brought in were a few the Crees had traded for new medicines.

But I never saw any horses on the river, aside from those owned and cared for by white men, that were not in wretched condition. The crude wooden saddle commonly used by the Indians was largely to blame, as it ripped the hide off a nag's back in no time. I've often seen the poor, tortured beasts turn and bite their sides till the blood streamed, once the saddle was removed. The Indians never paid any attention to their condition nor tried to correct the fault. They would throw the wooden saddle on to the raw flesh and ride them as unconcernedly as a white man would use a canoe.

The Rat's horse was fighting against the saddle. Its back was a ghastly sight. As I came on to the scene the maddened brute managed to break loose and ran for the plains. The Rat, in a whirlwind of rage, raised his gun, then decided the enjoyment would be too dear and started in pursuit afoot. I called out to him, and the moment he recognized me his dark face lighted up and he forgot the runaway and eagerly cried:

"Meester Chabo'? Where he ees?"

I replied that Chabot would come down the river as soon as he had packed up and had sent the Indians off some time within the next thirty days. His manner in asking the question rather puzzled me, for theoretically he should feel no enthusiasm for the head of a post that had discharged him. It was Mr. Henry who had turned the beggar loose, but according to the Red River way of thinking he should nurse resentment against all N. W. representatives.

"What do you want to see Mr. Chabot for?" I asked.

"I go to ride up the reever to see heem, to get heem to hire me," he explained.

"What are you quitting the X. Y. for?"

"Meester Chabo' ees one live man," he grinned. "Meester Dearness maybe a dead man when snow come some more."

"Who has charge of the Summer men while he's away?"

"Hees gal, maybe."

"Meaning his wife?"

"When Meester Chabo' hire me I can talk," was the noncommital reply. "I go to ride that —— horse, now she run away. She goes to ——. I paddle up to meet heem."

"You'll be sure to find him at the fort," I said. "But Mr. Dearness' girl? Could she handle the Summer men?"

"Han'le Summer men? ——! She can go to han'le the deveel like she want to," he emphatically assured.

Then, as if fearing he had talked too freely, he hurried away.

Now I didn't believe there was a mixed blood in the country capable of handling the Indians. Certainly there wasn't a squaw. Let her be ever so brainy, let her be educated in Quebec and made much of by the English and French, yet her Indian blood would be a terrific handicap when it came to handling her people. Such a woman could have a big influence with her people and swing trade to whatever post she favored. But as trader, having charge of the debts and advances and the rum, she couldn't do it. The hunters would not respect her commands. If she refused them liquor, they would take it more evilly than if she were a white.

Of course, I understood the Rat had a lively imagination. There was no reason to doubt his statement to the effect that Dearness was ill. We had received reports to the same effect. When his season closed he probably would send some one back to run things until Fall, when he, or his successor, would come on. If he were seriously ill, then any bargain I might make with him might be ignored by his successor.

Orders were orders, however, and I hurried on to the fort. The Rat called after me the cheering information that Dearness knew of my stopping Little Crane from taking his furs to the X. Y. and had advised the Indian to kill me. This scarcely primed me for a cordial reception, yet it was part of the game we were playing and worried me none.

THE FORT presented a scene of industrious activity despite the carousal going on inside the stockade. Men were making carts and fashioning wheels from solid sections from three-foot trees. A smith was turning out nails. Some sick

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Indians were making a sturgeon net while their women smoked tongues.

On the whole I really felt rather jealous of the discipline. Those drinking were obviously entitled to their liquor and had paid high for it. Red Dearness was like Mr. Henry in that respect; the drams were for those who had earned them. Somehow I gained the impression, probably from Chabot's sneering talk, that things were at sixes and sevens in the X. Y. post. The evidences did not support any such notions.

To be true, all was not harmony, and the master was having his rum troubles. As I entered the stockade I nearly stumbled over one of his hunters who had been stabbed six times in the side and abdomen and whom they were trying to heal with *wabeno* songs.

Entering the big room of the fort, I met a young man with a twisted face, who told me he was Angus, the clerk, and would I state my business.

"I want to speak with Mr. Dearness," I informed.

"You come from the N. W. post upstream?" he asked in a gloomy voice.

I answered in the affirmative and repeated my request. With much reluctance he told me I could not see the master.

"Scurvy treatment even for the X. Y. to give a N. W. man," I hotly retorted. "And I don't know that you have authority to tell me your master won't see me."

He squirmed uneasily, then blurted out: "He's drunk. He can't see any one."

This did not square up with what I had heard about him. He traded high wine for pelts, as did every Northman, but he was exceedingly temperate in his habits. I suspected the clerk wished to hide his master's illness from the N. W.

"I can wait," I said. "Mr. Chabot sent me to see him on business. He will be sobering up some time."

The clerk shook his head discouragingly, saying:

"He sleeps like a dead man. Very, very drunken."

I was electrified, and the clerk fairly jumped from his stool, as a clear voice from an inner room called out in the Chippewa tongue:

"That is not true, Angus. You know he isn't drunk and hasn't been drunk. Tell the young man he is ill from changing from meat to sturgeon."

It was a woman's voice, undoubtedly Madame's, or his "gal's," for I was getting mixed on the relationship. And it was a wonderfully musical voice. I was tempted to advance to the room, but the curtain of rawhide was pulled snug and the woman continued:

"Ask him what he wants here with your master. Have you lost your tongue?"

"I will ask him," Angus meekly replied in Chippewa.

"Let me tell my business without being asked," I fluently spoke up, rather proud of my knowledge of Chippewa. "Mr. Chabot wishes to make a bargain with the X. Y. to the end that neither the X. Y. nor the N. W. send out men to hunt for trade."

"He is sorry when he hears men are sent out on *derouin*," she mockingly retorted. "What about the *derouin* Pouliot made this Winter? Bah! The man is a snake, and I have no trust in a man that goes on his business."

"I am only a clerk," I stiffly replied, glaring at the curtain. "I'm not passing any tobacco to get help for Chabot. I obey orders."

She was silent for nearly a minute, and I was about to take my departure, when she spoke, very softly this time, saying:

"I am ashamed of my words. You are not to blame if Chabot is Chabot. The good God made him, as he did the skunk and white wolf. And only the good God knows why he made him."

"For the fur trade, just as He made the skunk and wolf for the fur trade," I smartly replied.

She ignored me and continued:

"The X. Y. will agree not to send men to trade in the Indian camps. It is a bad way to trade. The N. W. has been doing it on this river. If the N. W. stops it, we won't begin."

"You talk Chippewa like a native," I complimented.

"And French like a Frenchwoman, and English like an Englishwoman," she quickly answered, using the two languages.

"And I don't know which of the three you are," I regretted. "Am I not to see you?"

The rawhide curtain rattled viciously and in Chippewa she commanded:

"Make a writing for him to sign, binding the N. W. and the X. Y. not to make a *derouin*."

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CLERK ANGUS wrote rapidly, making two copies. I signed them and waited while he went to get the X. Y. signature. He did not go behind the closed curtain but to a similar recess at the opposite end of the room. He was absent for a few minutes and when he returned he was followed by Red Dearness.

The man was tall and very muscular. He was as heavy as Black Chabot, only a more graceful distribution of flesh and brawn did not allow him to look it. My first thought was, what a fight the two would make of it if they ever clashed. My second thought was one of congratulations to Chabot for having avoided a tussle.

Red Dearness' face possessed staying qualities which I knew Chabot lacked. His beard was long and full and as red as the Autumn sun when the smoke from prairie fires makes it look like fresh blood. His eyes were large and deep blue but sadly sunken. His general mien was that of great melancholy. My first glance told me it was not sturgeon diet that ailed him. Nor had he been drinking. He impressed me as being marked by Death, and yet there was no falling away of the flesh, no lack of elasticity in his step as he approached me.

"I have heard what you have said and what has been said by you. I have your signature to a paper, which pretends to bind your company together with the X. Y. to post trading entirely. I have signed the agreement. I will send no man to trade among the Indians. They must bring their hunt to the post. I agree, not because Chabot asks it nor because I expect him to keep his agreement, but because it is the one thing a post must do if it is to exist. Your people have used me foully. You have stolen my skins from my Indians. Little Crane was robbed of a pack belonging to me."

Not even a sick man can accuse me of that without hearing my voice. Had he accused Chabot of robbing the women, I would have admitted the offense; for that was a nasty fact. Evidently he had not learned of that particular coup yet. I contented myself with saying:

"I was the man who took the skins from the Crane. He took a debt and we wanted it paid. The skins belonged to us."

"Damnation! He's taken a debt from us. Now he will never pay," fumed Dearness, his blue eyes blazing. His anger seemed to tire him, and he more quietly continued, "I am doing you the compliment of taking your word for it."

"You had better," I shortly retorted, "or when you recover your health I should have to have a reckoning with you."

"You young fool!" he contemptuously replied.

The woman behind the curtain laughed derisively. I must have colored or in some way shown my anger, for in a more decent tone he said:

"There! There! Words are foolish as the pounding of sticks on those cursed medicine drums. If I spoke harshly, it was out of envy for your youth and health. After all, we're but a handful of white men up here and should stick together as much as the trade will allow. You will eat with us."

"Does the young lady who laughed at me eat with us?" I asked.

"She keeps quite by herself," he slowly replied, staring at me in a peculiar manner.

"And I think I will follow her example," I decided. "One word before I go. We'll call it a bonus for signing the paper. You have a man—the Rat—hired as interpreter. He's a scoundrel."

"They all are," he quietly reminded.

"It's not my business to warn the X. Y. against his tricks. I have spoken."

"I shall break his neck for his tricks some day," said Dearness. "However, I thank you for your warning. We're getting ceremonious enough for Quebec when the season is high. Now I must give you what may not set well on your stomach. Your master, Black Chabot, is a rascal."

As he spoke he leaned forward and stared round-eyed, as if expecting a hot denial.

"He's a —— rascal," I corrected.

The ghost of a smile played round his bearded lips. The tinkle of a little laugh came from behind the hide curtain.

"You should be working with honest men, working for the X. Y.," he murmured.

"The N. W. has the best men in the business. Skunks are found everywhere."

"True," he mused; "only a skunk's pelt is worth something. Sir Alexander McKenzie appreciates young men who can do things."

"So does Simon McTavish," I added.

"It's hopeless for me to even suggest it, isn't it?"

"Quite. Now that I've done my errand I'll be going."

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"You'll not change your mind and eat?"

"I'll eat at our post. It's so close it would be foolish for me not to."

He glanced toward the curtains and I flushed beneath the tan of the April wind. He was amusing himself with thinking I would have stayed gladly enough if the woman had offered to join us.

He rose and followed me to the door, and either he was suddenly in physical agony, or else the sunlight revealed more than I had already noticed, for his eyes were contracted and his lips pressed firmly. We exchanged a courteous farewell and I went to my canoe, already regretting I had not accepted his invitation to eat with him. In all probability I should have seen the woman. And speech with an educated woman, as I knew this woman was educated, would be a heavenly treat after three years of isolation.

Until this day I had known of but one white woman ever being on the river. She had come with some Orkney islanders, disguised as a boy. She betrayed her secret to one man at the Forks, who debauched her, and her child was born at our fort, the first white child born on the Red River of the North.

To return to the Dearness woman; whether she was a white or a breed I couldn't decide. Rumor and gossip had given me to understand she was mixed blood. But if such she must have been taken East when very young to be educated by the Sisters. I had met French-Indian and English-Indian girls in Montreal and Quebec who would grace any home.

This incident of calling on Red Dearness, so long in the telling, was a great adventure for me. It gave me a new train of thought. It is the lack of fresh mental food and the eternal chewing over the same thoughts which drive men mad in the lonely places. No one can appreciate the thrill and zest that such a trivial encounter can afford one who has lived in a savage rut month on month.

Accordingly I was in something of a state of mind when I returned to the post and found Desset excitedly superintending the last of the packing. The storehouse was cleared and the Indian women and children were rummaging through it in frantic search for articles overlooked. They had even taken up the whitewood flooring in hope of finding trinkets dropped through the cracks.

Desset's activity astonished me. He was like a man fighting against time.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" I asked.

He grinned sheepishly, hesitated, gave me one of his sly glances, then frankly confessed:

"I'm so keen to get out of this country. It makes me forget if I am busy."

"But it will be days and weeks before the brigade comes down. You've packed all your goods. What will you do if the Indians bring in a hunt?"

"I've got plenty of rum out and ready," he replied with a vacuous laugh.

"The Indians seem to have had enough," I observed as I caught an outburst from the stockade.

"The red beggars won't have any more," he growled.

"You'll have to give them presents when you go away," I reminded. "Ho! When did that rascal come?"

I pointed to the reeling figure of Old Crow.

"Since you came," was the careless reply.

It surprized me the Indian would come alone down the river, and I knew his wife and child would have none of his company. I couldn't believe Chabot had driven him out of the fort, as Chabot had lost his power as a disciplinarian. I sauntered up to the stockade gate and glanced inside.

It was the usual scene. Old Crow held my interest, however. He not only had had too much liquor, but he was also wearing a red hat with a round red feather in it, usually a gift for a chief. I knew he had not traded a skin for the season. I caught him by the arm as he was dancing by in a drunken line and asked—

"Who sent you here?"

"Black Face," he answered, meaning Chabot.

"What did you bring?"

"The white bark that talks," he grunted, lurching away to join the dancers.

I WOULD have given a prime skin to know what written message Black Chabot had sent to Desset. No doubt but that it concerned some of their schemes for looting the N. W. I found something to eat and heartily wished I had accepted Red Dearness' invitation to eat at the X. Y. Confusion and clamor surrounded me, Desset allowing the Indians to overrun the fort as if it had been abandoned. One fellow boldly tried to take

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away my sugar, and when I resented it his woman took offense. It was only by an extravagant display of anger that I brought them to their senses. If the day had not been so far advanced, I would have taken to the canoe and returned up-stream.

Going to the river, I found Flat Mouth and a man of his band dragging the water for sturgeon by suspending a long net between two canoes and sweeping up-stream. Mr. Henry was the first to introduce such a net to the Red. While I watched them, a man came in with eight kegs of new sugar and six beaver skins. Desset came down to the river as the man landed, but he showed no enthusiasm for the trade. He gave the impression of being annoyed and refused to trade anything but high wine, powder and ball. An idea of how permanent alcohol stood in our trade ventures is shown from the fact that, out of twenty-eight "pieces" of assorted goods brought in by each canoe in the early Fall, ten were kegs of liquor, each holding nine gallons. Gunpowder, which one might expect to hold first place, furnished only two kegs per canoe.

The fort was so noisy that night, and there was so much fighting going on that I moved back into the woods where Flat Mouth threw together a shelter and where we built a small fire and roasted some fish and spent the night.

After our morning meal we started for our canoe, eager to be quit of the place. The Indians were quiet, either sick or sleeping, and I saw nothing of Desset. We were near the bank when out of the early shadows up-river shot a canoe, and after a glance Flat Mouth said it was the Rat. He also pulled the casing off his gun and suggested the man was fleeing from an enemy, perhaps the Sioux; this because the Rat gave an excellent exhibition of a man in a great hurry. I pooh-poohed the Sioux notion. Even if they came in such force as to take the Pembina post there would have been a few survivors to flee down the river. Instead of crossing the mouth of the Scratching and making the X. Y. post, the Rat drove full speed for our bank and was ashore almost before his canoe found the mud.

Without a word to me he started on the run for the post and I chased after him. Desset had seen him land and was at the stockade gate, his manner nervous.

"Very soon! Met heem coming like ——!" exploded the Rat.

"Did he send any word?" asked Desset, his eyes brightening.

"To be ready. That is all."

Having finished his errand, the Rat ran back to his canoe and set off for the X. Y. establishment.

"Who did he meet? What's up?" I impatiently asked.

"I supposed you knew," innocently answered Desset. "Nothing's up except what happens every Spring. The Pembina post brigade is going out. Mr. Chabot sends word he will be here soon and that I'm to have my packs ready to join him."

"The brigade going out?" I spluttered. "Devil's hoofs! The Rat must have lied. Nothing has been done about the planting, next season's fuel, arranging for the Summer men——"

"I should think, Mr. Franklin, those were matters for your superior to worry about," tartly broke in Desset.

"I don't think he will worry about them," I slowly replied. "Maybe his superiors will, though."

He turned away to round up some Indians recovered enough from their spree to carry the packs to the shore. I walked leisurely back to the river. Chabot had told me I would have ample time to return and get together some few belongings; he had intended from the first to make this unusually early start. Mr. Henry usually went out during the last week in May or early in June. The only explanation I could scare up was that Chabot, his nerves shaken by rum, was in a panic lest our Indians rise and massacre us. Perhaps my mentioning old Tabashaw's boast that he could kill a man, white or red, by just wishing him to die was responsible. Anyway, I now knew the nature of the message Old Crow had brought to Desset. The clerk had been ordered to have everything in readiness for an immediate departure.

My personal effects at the post could await my return in the Fall or be stolen. They were of not enough value to worry over. I had my double-barrel gun, my dearest possession, and I could arrange with one of the X. Y. people to go after my horse or to care for it after Flat Mouth brought it down. Probos, our clerk at the Reed, would be left in charge of the post during the Summer, but I did not wish to

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rust the horse to him. He was honest but low-witted. The Crees could steal his moccasins and he would never know it until he went out barefooted and got a blade of porcupine-grass through a toe.

Now a dozen canoes of Indian families turned the bend above, stringing out in a long procession; then came the post's nine canoes and two boats, a man in each, the rest of the space being heaped high with equipage and skins. This would leave twenty-odd Indian canoes unaccounted for and I was forced to the conclusion that despite his precipitate departure Chabot had found time to make up small assortments of trade goods for the Hills and other outposts and to assign hunting territory to the Summer men.

FLAT MOUTH, who stood beside me watching the brigade, now gave a low grunt. I observed he had shifted his attention down-stream. I looked in that direction and beheld the X. Y. brigade of eight canoes was starting down-river. This was my second great surprize of the morning.

Yesterday Red Dearness had shown no symptoms of taking an early departure. Now he was off, and seemingly in great haste to precede our brigade. When Mr. Henry ruled at the Pembina post, rival brigades usually traveled to the Forks each Spring in a most neighborly fashion.

Red Dearness, enveloped in a cloak, was in the first canoe. He turned and looked back only once, and then to wave his hand to the X. Y. fort. Dearness, I deduced, was in a serious state of health, and some sudden symptoms had forced his departure. Which of the blanketed figures was the woman who talked in English, French and Chippewa it was impossible to determine. Angus, the clerk, stood clear of the woods on the little point and limply waved a hand in farewell.

Poor devil! I pitied him for the loneliness he must endure as Summer keeper of the fort, for the stench of the decaying buffalo, for the possible plague of grasshoppers which would rival the buffalo in stinks. For when these pests came to blight the land they died in millions along the river. I've seen the shores of Winnipeg inches deep with them decaying. Oh, I had room to pity him for many things, even if he did belong to the opposition.

Our brigade swung ashore and the Indians gave a hand in unloading the skin canoes and turning them up to be dried out by the sun. Chabot arrived last, having Probos with him. I greeted him and reported on the agreement signed by me in behalf of the N. W. and by Dearness for the X. Y., by the terms of which neither in the department of the Lower Red River was to drum up trade among the Indians.

He was not interested in my report but stood and grinned ferociously down the river and boasted:

"The red rat wasn't keen to see me. According to your say, he was going to do something about the furs I took from his women. —— him! I was loaded for him. He knew it, too. Skun out ahead of me, eh? Well, maybe I'll catch up with him before he makes the Forks."

"He's a sick man," I said.

"He'll be a —— sight sicker before I get through with him," he bragged.

"If you have any trouble with him, you must kill him. If you don't, he will kill you. I talked enough to know he will go the full distance. While sick, he hasn't lost his strength. Heart, probably."

Chabot lost some of his assurance and his leer changed to a dark scowl. I asked:

"How is it you go out so early? I thought I was to have time to get back and pack up some of my belongings."

"It's likely the affairs of the Northwest Company will be held up to make things easier for you," he sneered.

"At least tell me when you leave here. I've got to arrange to send for my horse and have him cared for."

"I start just as soon as the skin canoes get dry and Desset is ready."

Now something was amusing him, for as he finished he commenced chuckling. I suspected it might be the canoe-load of furs he and Desset had sent off. With an oath he suddenly began raging:

"That —— Desset has gone and lost his accounts! Let some drunken Indians burn them up. Pretty Northman he'll make! I'd planned to leave him to look after the Summer trade, but now the company will want to shift or ship him."

"He expects to go along with you. He's been busy packing ever since Old Crow brought your message."

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He slowly turned and eyed me, to see if my words hid anything.

"He'll go as far as the Forks, where e'll wait for the Assiniboin brigade to come down. I ought to get orders from up country about his case. How did you know anything about my message?" The last savagely.

"I was here when the Crow came," I lied, not wishing to make trouble for the Indian. "Joe Pouliot was pretty lucky to make that *derouin*. Two hundred skins."

"Desset will never make a Northman. He talks too much. The X. Y. will hear of it and then they'll howl."

"He's your man. You brought him here."

"Then it's none of your —— business, Franklin!" he roared, his beard seeming to bristle. "I don't like your way of talking."

"All right. I'm through. Here's the Rat dancing round to speak to you."

Chabot mumbled under his breath and turned aside. The Rat, with much writhing and gesticulating, poured out a torrent of softly spoken words. Chabot listened with a frown creasing his forehead. When the Rat had finished, he answered him briefly, talking from the corner of his mouth. The Rat fell back.

"Hired him?" I inquired.

"Told him to go to ——!" Chabot growled. Which was surprizing to learn after seeing how resignedly the Rat had taken it.

That night Chabot and Desset and Probos and a few of the men—whites—drank deeply from a ten-gallon keg of brandy and distributed much mixed rum not only to our Indians but also to those eagerly flocking across the river from the X. Y. post. An Indian can scent rum a mile, I believe. Open a keg in any open space with not a redskin in sight, and before you know it they will begin to drop in like crows calling on a dead buffalo.

They gave away fifteen kegs all told and speedily put a fighting edge on the Chippewas. Inside of an hour after the bout began I saw four separate combats going on at the same time. As I was leaving the hall, Old Tabashaw stumbled against me in the dark. When I pushed him away he attempted to stab me. I knocked him down and threw him out. Little Shell, imagining him to be a Sioux, grabbed his hair and would have counted coup if my foot hadn't landed under his chin. Desset, under orders from Chabot, had endeavored to collect all weapons before giving out the rum, but I never saw an Indian drinking match yet when weapons could not be produced. This night the women were largely to blame, as they persisted in smuggling knives to their men.

EARLY next morning we routed the Indians, but many of them were in no condition to go on. There was no intention of taking any with us except those bound for the Assiniboin, where they proposed to summer. With a hearty shower of curses Chabot assigned families to various locations for the Summer hunt.

He told some to go after red deer and bear east of the Red, while others were to go after buffalo on the plains. I noticed that neither Desset nor Probos was taking any notes of these orders. The former, I knew, was booked for a home passage, but Probos would be shifted from the Reed to the Pembina. When he had finished, Chabot wheeled on me and fiercely demanded—

"So you can carry all that in your noodle, eh?"

"In my noodle?" I blankly repeated.

"You heard me say it," he growled.

"But why should your orders interest me? It's for your Summer man to prick up his ears."

He grinned maliciously, fished out his orders received from the last express, placed a trembling finger on one paragraph and invited me to read. It was an order for me to remain at the Pembina post during the Summer, with Probos staying at the Reed camp and keeping an eye on the Scratching River post, which was to be closed after the brigade departed. Chabot had known this all the time and had allowed me to believe I was going back east.

For fully a minute I stood stiff and motionless, frozen all over with rage and disappointment. His rough voice sounded far off as he explained:

"This post will be closed. The Reed camp will bring their trade to you at Pembina. Just remember my orders to the Summer men and you'll have a mighty fine and easy time of it. Before I go, I'll take a long drink to the new master of the Pembina post."

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My hand dropped to my knife, but I clinched my hands and walked away, fighting to keep my mouth shut, my fists closed until sure of myself.

My first impulse was to enter my canoe and paddle down-stream to the Forks. Gradually reason stole through my black mood. After all, the orders did not originate with him. Some of the gentlemen of the North had picked me to have charge of the Lower Red River department until the brigade returned in the Fall. Black Chabot's cruelty was his withholding of the information. There was nothing to compel me to remain there. I was free to refuse if I so wished.

Chabot, not done with his tormenting, came after me, perhaps to spur me into quitting the river, and arrogantly demanded:

"What do you mean? Mean you won't take this high honor—that you won't serve as master at Pembina, per orders?"

The Reed River clerk was watching us with a greedy gleam in his eyes. Chabot had brought him along, intending to promote him to the position after bullying me into refusing it. The master was expecting me to refuse, was hoping I would. Did I refuse, he would treat me well enough all the way to Montreal, satisfied in knowing the N. W. would have no more of me.

"Refuse? God bless you, no!" I cried, forcing a ringing, exulting note into my voice. "Refuse promotion from clerk to master? Why, I came out here to make a career, to become a Northman. I shall do everything necessary to keep the post fit. But, so long as I am to be master in your place, you take your assignments of the Summer hunters and go to ——!"

Which was well within my right to say.

CHAPTER III

THE STOLEN VOICE

THE return up the river was dreary enough for me. Probos and a family of Indians accompanied us as far as the mouth of the Reed. Leaving them, Flat Mouth and I hurried on, with old Tabashaw and several families pursuing in the vain hope of free rum. At least I would be the master until relieved of my trust, and I was determined that neither the chief nor any of his following should have any liquor until they earned it. If they would drink, they must work. As one of the results of the drinking bout at the Scratching post, there was the burning of a Summer Indian's tent.

Chabot had just advanced goods to him to the value of a hundred and fifty skins. That is, he was to pay us in skins according to our valuation of that number of pelts. Now the goods were burned, we would get never a pelt from him. Just above the Reed we met the Northwest Annual Winter Express from the Athabasca, making all speed to overtake the brigade. They stopped only long enough to voice their surprize at having found the post closed and to ask if the Indians were on the war-path.

The fort looked very lonely as we drew ashore and hauled up our canoe. The solitude of the place was intense even when we were surrounded by drunken Indians. Now it was deathly. The procession of drowned buffaloes was thinning out, though still the river rolled a daily grist over the southern horizon. Within twenty-four hours after my return I had sixty-five men and women, brigades of children and nearly a hundred dogs camping about the stockade. All were begging for rum except the dogs. I called for Tabashaw, who came on the jump, and explained to him his people should be leaving for the Pembina mountains to make their Summer hunt.

The crafty old villain loudly replied:

"When Tabashaw speaks, they will go. Tabashaw is chief of the Chippewas. It is for him to send his people on the hunt."

Meaning that it was none of James Franklin's business what the Chippewa men should do.

"I have heard you speak," I carelessly answered. "I am very busy. I must write down each word you say, so the gentlemen of the North can see by the talking paper just what kind of a man you are."

He wriggled uneasily. The accounts I worked on each day were a big mystery to him. That I could preserve in writing a verbatim report of every word spoken in my hearing was no harder for him to believe than was any other of the phenomena of the white man's ways.

"A little rum will smooth the road to the hills," he cunningly reminded.

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I bowed over my books and pointed to the door. He withdrew and commenced a violent tirade against me. He was concluding with a spirited call for volunteers to rush in and cut my throat and seize the milk when he glimpsed me at the window, apparently taking down his speech. Without comprehending that the written word could never condemn him until delivered, he flew into a panic and with many an explosive "Hough!" bitterly upbraided his people for not departing at once. Yet I did not feel easy until I saw the entire party with their nine horses and many dogs strung out in a mile-long line.

They left just in time to escape a fine fright. Two Indians came tearing down the river, wild with fear. They had been hunting at Grandes Fourches (Grand Forks, North Dakota) and had found where a man had placed sticks to kneel on in drinking. On the same day they came upon a buffalo bull, and it was wounded. Two positive proofs the Sioux were hiding in that neighborhood. They packed their hunt into their canoes and wanted me to know they were through with any country above the Pembina fort.

As they brought forty beaver and seven bear, my alarm was tempered with rejoicing. Now that old Tabashaw and his crew were gone I threw in a gallon of mixed wine as a bonus. It came off cold that night with snow. The plains had been clear and dry for several days, but with the storm the buffaloes edged in to find shelter in the timber along the river. By the time we were settled we could hear them crashing about close to the fort and at times scraping against the stockade. The wolves followed them in, looking for an unprotected calf or a sick creature. I've noticed that while wolves can run a herd for short distances the beasts will not stampede because of them. That is why our Indians always suspected the Sioux instead of four-legged wolves when they saw the buffaloes in rapid motion.

The wolves, however, aroused our dogs, and what with the whistling of the storm and the racket made by the brutes one needed to be very tired to sleep.

In the morning we found several inches of snow but with the sun fast melting it. Flat Mouth came to me and gave it as his opinion that the Sioux were above us. Had he been any other Indian, I would have laughed at him. He had fought them many times and was not quick to give the alarm.

"The men saw their own tracks and grew afraid," I insisted, to drive him into giving me some reason.

From under his blanket he drew an arrow, short of shaft and long in feathering, with shallow grooves down the shaft—the "lightning marks" or "blood" grooves.

"Sioux," he quietly said.

"Where did you get it?"

He pointed to the river, where buffaloes were occasionally floating by.

"It was sticking into a bull. The bull was not killed by water but was chased into the river."

If I had had a half dozen whites and some sober Chippewas inside the stout stockade, I would have defied half a thousand Sioux to dig me out. But, being alone, my Indians off in the hills, it might come to pass that I should seek safety in flight down the river to save my skull from serving as a drinking-dish. Such a forced retreat on the part of a white man and a Northman would demean him in the estimation of the Indians.

"If there are Sioux at Grandes Fourches or this side, I must know it at once. I shall start up the river within an hour."

"If the Sioux have come, they will cross the river to steal down on the east side," he said.

"Then I will go up the east side and do two jobs at once. There should be some of the Red Sucker band making sugar at Thief River. I must see them. There should be good beaver at Goose River. I want to look that country over."

"You will find Sioux," he warned, turning away.

I did not ask him to go with me. The sun was warm and the snow was melting fast, and by the time I was ready to start it was gone. I planned to go horseback, as the country was level to Park River. The beast showed an ugly streak when I headed him south along the edge of the timber instead of taking after the buffalo, which were now far out on the plain.

There was a danger that the Sioux might be concealed anywhere along the bank, but that was a risk I must take. Flat Mouth was not in sight when I quit the fort, and I was deciding I must make the trip alone when he overtook me. Without a word he

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took the lead. Late afternoon brought us to the Park, which we crossed on a log bridge built by Mr. Henry the year before.

Thus far we had seen nothing alarming and made our camp a few miles beyond the river. Before sunrise we were mounted and rejoicing that the weather still held clear with the river dropping rapidly. We crossed to the east bank of the Red, wallowing to our horses' bellies in the mud left by high water.

We went through two miles of strong timber, then struck willow and poplar, filled with red deer. We were continually scaring the creatures into flight and I made a mental note of the place for the benefit of our hunters. The willows were bad enough, but nothing compared with the stretch we next encountered. Now it was long grass concealing holes, and marsh ground, which tired our nags greatly. Not until midday did we reach decent footing on an open plain. The deer signs were very thick whenever we struck a little stream.

Plenty of bears was shown by the appearance of the bushes, where they had gathered fruit and berries the season before. That night we camped on Snake River without having discovered any signs of either friendly or hostile Indians.

Flat Mouth lost none of his keen concern. I had been with him enough to know he expected trouble. In the morning we crossed the Snake to follow up its western bank and in a few hours were in sight of the strong woods along Red Lake River.

Now Flat Mouth motioned for me to hold back. Leaving his horse with me, he went on a discovery. A turkey-buzzard was lazily ascending above the tree tops, and it was the presence of this scavenger, leaving his feeding, that had attracted the Pillager Chief's attention. I waited half an hour; then Flat Mouth came into view and beckoned me to approach. I rode ahead, leading his animal, but I could surmise nothing from his face. Therefore, the shock to my nerves was severe when, without a word of warning, he led me to the remains of a bloody tragedy.

AN INDIAN, one of the Red Sucker band, was on the ground, his body feathered with arrows. He had been mutilated beyond all imagining. The Sioux—for there was no mistaking their work—had raised the scalp and removed the skull to use it as a dish. After I recovered my composure Flat Mouth pointed ahead and informed:

"Signs two days old. They followed him from up the river. He came from somewhere near mouth of the Red Lake River. He was carrying a pack of beaver on his back."

Mounting his horse, he again took the lead, and we passed through the woods to the bank of the Red Lake and found ourselves opposite the mouth of the Clearwater. This stream, very rapid where it empties into the Red Lake, was famous for sturgeon. A short distance above the mouth was the ruins of the Winter post built several years before by Jean Baptiste Cadotte. His father, of the same name, went to Michilimackinac fifty years back. Flat Mouth told me it was Cadotte senior who prevailed on the Lake Superior Chippewas not to join in Pontiac's conspiracy against the western garrisons. I had visited the ruins the year before and had no desire to go there again, as the woodticks would devour us. I intimated as much when Flat Mouth started up the bush-grown path. He gave a low hiss for silence and pointed to some almost imperceptible marks on the edge of the bank while his lips formed the word—

"Sioux!"

Now I was after Sioux, but I was not a bit anxious to come upon them unexpectedly or while they were in any inconsiderable number. Then again the sight I had just witnessed rather weakened my fighting spirit. My companion seemed to read my thoughts, for he whispered—

"Hurt."

I plucked up spirit. If the Sioux were hurt, I wasn't much frightened. I nodded, and we dismounted and led our horses along the narrow path.

It was only a short distance to the old Cadotte place and once more I acted the hostler while the Indian went ahead. This time I was alone only a few minutes, and this time his gestures on returning to me were those of exultation. I hurried forward and beheld another dead Indian. The Red Sucker Indian had struck like a rattlesnake before being killed, and he had bagged a noble victim. For the dead man must have been a great war chief. This was indicated by his feathered head-dress and the beautiful redstone pipe by his side.

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A buckskin bag, which had held his medicine and mysteries, had been torn to pieces by wolves. The beasts had mauled the body until it was only a bundle of bloody bones and torn leather. By some freak the head-dress had not been disturbed. Altogether, the remnants of the dead man's dignity were in a sad condition.

"They were in a big hurry," explained Flat Mouth. "Some time they will come to get the bones. The Red Sucker was taken by surprize while carrying the pack. He had just time to throw his ax and crack the Sioux's head when the others got him. It was a good trade."

"If they are in a hurry, we can hurry," I urged. "I must know whether they have left this country or are hanging around for more scalps."

"Only a few came up here. Lost their war-chief and ran back to their war-camp near Grandes Fourches. May find them quick if we follow."

Which meant we might find them before we were prepared for the meeting.

The sight of the war-chief revived my fighting courage. Thus far the Chippewa nation had no reason for hanging its head. Flat Mouth scalped the chief and followed the trail down-stream till we struck the main river. There the signs prompted him to cross over to the mouth of the Cottonwood. We struck into a beaten path made by deer and for a bit lost the trail. When Flat Mouth picked it up he showed surprize. Instead of making off southwest to Grandes Fourches, it led us back north, forcing us to recross the Red Lake River, then swerving to the northeast toward Thief River, which empties into the main river below the Clearwater. In short, we were traveling in a rough circle.

Flat Mouth reasoned it out, saying:

"The Sioux were very much afraid when their war chief was killed. They started to run back to their camp and ride their ponies for home. Then they remembered the beaver pack. If the Chippewa was taking it down the river, he would be in a canoe. They know the maple grows thick along the Thief. Good beaver as well as sugar country. They think the dead Indian came from there. They forget they are afraid at the loss of their chief. They want to take more skulls. So they start to find the dead man's family."

There was no need for hurrying, as either the Sioux had found their victims or hadn't. As it was near sundown, I suggested that we camp. He agreed and, still holding his gun, began picking up dry twigs with one hand, working in nearer the woods very slowly.

"You've got enough wood," I called out, making to dismount and much surprized that he should think of lighting a fire.

He startled me by dropping a handful of twigs and by raising his gun and firing among the trees.

His shot evoked a chorus of fiendish yells and a volley of arrows and the *snick* of a lead ball against a tree. Almost immediately six Sioux warriors, hideous in their paint and howling like demons, burst from cover. Flat Mouth moved back, keeping his face to them, coolly reloading. On sighting me, a white man, they came to a halt, undecided for a few seconds as to what course to pursue. While they were weighing the matter I let drive with the right barrel and scuffed off the top of a man's head; the gun was loaded for buffalo bulls.

With a shriek of rage, fully believing our guns were empty, the remaining five sprang forward. I fired the left barrel, potting another warrior. Had they pressed the attack they would have had us for the killing, but according to their ignorant notions a gun that shoots twice can shoot indefinitely. With yelps of fear they faced about and raced for cover. By this time Flat Mouth had reloaded. He sprang on his horse to get a better view of the bush-grown ground at the edge of the timber and scored his second kill. Then he threw back his head and raised the Pillager Chippewa yell of triumph. And for good measure, being proud of my race, proud of my two shots, and somewhat young withal, I added my voice to his.

I told him he could have my scalps and claim the double kill if he wished to. This, I knew, would stand him such a coup as no Chippewa had counted within the knowledge of their oldest men. I waited until he had finished his ghastly work and selected a beaded buckskin bag which contained some colored stones and bits of colored feathers. This, Flat Mouth said, was Cheyenne work and must have belonged to a big chief. The bearer of it had killed his man, as shown by the feather in his hair, but he was no chief.

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"The bag held the chief's medicine. It belonged to the dead chief on the Clearwater. One of the Sioux was taking it home, leaving his own in its place. It must be strong medicine to belong to a chief."

And Flat Mouth eyed it with awe.

"It wasn't strong enough to protect him," I reminded, slipping the trophy into my pocket.

"No man knows how strong his medicine is until he fights," was the reply.

Flushed with success, Flat Mouth wanted to chase the Sioux, depending upon my gun to slay another brace. I refused. The Sioux had lost heavily on the expedition. Five men—and one a big chief—killed, and only a Chippewa skull to show for it. Whoever carried the pipe on that raid lost caste once they sighted their village and began throwing themselves to the ground to prepare their people for bad news.

Many a finger on the left hand would lose a joint when the relatives and friends of the dead went into mourning. Then again the Sioux afoot could easily evade us. Once they reached their ponies they would lose no time in retreating. They would believe other whites were near.

Most potent of all was the medicine of my gun, shooting twice without reloading. It would be talked about from the upper waters of the Missouri down to the Mississippi. This miracle alone should keep them from the river for the whole season. We had done our work well. We had located beaver and maple-sugar country—the real maple, not the ash-leaf which grew near our post.

So we found a suitable spot on the river and camped. Flat Mouth tied his hunting-knife to a sapling and speared a sturgeon. I stumbled on to a small herd of buffalo which were in much better flesh than those on the west side of the river. I shot a calf to get the hindquarters for steak. While I was acting the cook the Pillager investigated up the river.

He had been unable to locate the dead man's family, but he had found the camp. That the Sioux had not found the camp—or, at any event, had not come upon the family—was evident by Flat Mouth's failure to find any victims. My companion believed the men and women and children at the camp had taken alarm and fled far back into the marsh country. I afterward learned that this was true.

FLAT MOUTH regretted exceedingly the absence of his friends from the post, for seldom would the Red River Chippewas have such a glorious collection of hair to dance. I was pleased they were gone, for it saved the cost of a prolonged drinking bout.

Of course I gave Flat Mouth a generous allowance, and he spent the evening in arranging his hair and painting his face and pounding on a drum and chanting his songs. After building a song that narrated each move in the fight, and, being thoroughly primed, he let out a terrific yell and danced the scalps.

In the morning Flat Mouth's luck was still with him, as he managed to kill two beaver opposite the fort. I turned gardener. Thanks to the foresight of Mr. Henry on entering the country, we were able to raise many vegetables.

Our harvest was aside from what the Indian women and children stole. This kind of thievery became such a nuisance that we were compelled to inclose the whole potato field with a high stockade. Otherwise it would have been necessary to post a guard by day and night.

I had just traded the two beaver killed by Flat Mouth and was on my way to plan my garden campaign when six Crees and two Assiniboins came in. All told, they had a dozen beaver and a quantity of wild fowl.

I traded and gave them a dram, but while they drank they kept their bows and arrows in their hands and seemed suspicious of something. At first I thought they were afraid of the Sioux pouncing down upon us. To quiet their fears I told them of Flat Mouth's coup. They put no stock in my story till the chief came dancing in and held the scalps up before them.

Now this should have brought them great joy, for according to their beliefs nothing is so wholesome as a Sioux warrior dead. Yet the sight of the scalps seemed to alarm them instead of bringing them any pleasure. Their attitude was sullen as they heard Flat Mouth recite his coups. Finally he made his exit, still dancing and singing the song he had composed.

"What is the matter with my friends? It is time you finished your milk and went to the hills where the Chippewas are hunting," I rebuked.

"The Chippewas have stolen our medicine.

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We will not go among them," informed White Buffalo, leader of the Crees.

His companions followed the speaker's example of staring after the Pillager, their bows and arrows ready for instant use.

"What do you mean by drinking in my house while you hold strung bows in your hands?" I demanded. "Have you passed war-tobacco against my children, the Chippewas?"

"We have passed no tobacco," grunted White Buffalo. "Do not be afraid, white man, that we shall make a fight. We can not fight. The Chippewas have stolen our medicine."

NO MATTER how ridiculous I might think this allegation to be, I knew it was the most serious matter on earth to them. If they sincerely believed the Chippewas had stolen their medicine, then good-by to the hunting on the lower Red River. The accusation might easily create a situation more grave than any spasmodic attack by the Sioux.

"What medicine have they stolen?" I solemnly asked.

White Buffalo pointed after Flat Mouth and gloomily replied:

"It was our stolen medicine that let the Pillager chief count coup against the Sioux. No Chippewa can take four scalps with only Chippewa medicine to help him."

This would have impressed a newcomer as being the silly superstition of an Indian. And yet, unless happily cleared up, it might mean the ruin of the North West Company's fur trade on both the Assiniboin and Red. The story would spread like a malignant disease.

It was fortunate that the Chippewas were in the hills. Flat Mouth was too deeply engrossed with preparing his scalps as permanent trophies to bother us. Realizing the uselessness of attempting to force an explanation, or of belittling the accusation, I waited. At last White Buffalo continued:

"The Sioux followed the Voice and it led them to Flat Mouth. The Voice made the Sioux blind and they did not know Flat Mouth was cracking their skulls."

"The Voice?" I repeated, seizing upon this, the first clue to the Cree's meaning.

"The River That Calls has lost its Voice," informed White Buffalo with a little shiver.

Now Riviere Qu' Appelle, as the French knew it, or Catabuysepu, as the Crees named it, was regarded with much awe and fear by the Indians of the Northwest. It being the main fork of the Assiniboin, my travels up that river had made me somewhat familiar with it. It derives its quaint name from an Indian belief that a mighty spirit haunts it, flying along its course and crying aloud in what sounds like a human voice. I had never observed that the Calling spoke differently than any other river. But some one had tagged the superstition to it, and some *manito* lived there.

What I couldn't understand was my visitors' reason for believing the Chippewas had stolen this spirit, or Voice. While the belief persisted, however, it was as grave a matter and very detrimental to our interests.

"When did the Voice go away?" I asked.

"So many sleeps," mumbled White Buffalo, holding up his fingers to indicate a week. "It was the Voice that helped Flat Mouth take his scalp."

"Perhaps the Voice is tired and is resting," I suggested. "It may be asleep, waiting for the mud-water to leave the river." The last was the true solution, I believed. Freshet water had eliminated the little, musical tinkling sounds of the shallows, and perhaps had interfered with the air currents and their murmurings among the trees.

"On the Pembina, above this fort, we have heard the Voice," was the rejoinder.

"You heard a Summer bird singing."

Ignoring me as if I had never spoken, White Buffalo continued:

"We have heard the Voice on the Red River. It sounded like women weeping. The Voice wants to go back home. The Chippewas can not keep it."

The Crees worshiped the Voice because it was big medicine. It was powerful enough to permit Flat Mouth to kill four Sioux warriors. White Buffalo believed that as thoroughly as he believed he liked rum. Yet a stronger Chippewa medicine held it prisoner. It wept and moaned and wanted to go back to the River That Calls and couldn't, and the Crees intended to rescue it by force of their bows and arrows. So I solemnly promised:

"Within a moon I will see that the Voice is back on the Catabuysepu." I believed that inside a month the river would be back to normal conditions. "Let the Chippewa magic be ever so strong, there is no medicine as strong as the white man's. But there must be no fighting with the Chippewas.

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If any blows are struck, the Voice will refuse to return."

My bold assurance seemed to put a little heart in them, although White Buffalo was curious to know why it took a moon for my strong medicine to work.

"My medicine can work as quick as that," I said, snapping my fingers. "But it will take a little time to learn if the Crees have done some evil thing and have driven the Voice away."

All protested their innocence. One of the Assiniboins smacked his lips over the dregs of his rum and informed me—

"No Summer trade will go to the Scratching."

I attached no importance to this remark, thinking the wily fellow was fishing for more rum. I pricked up my ears when he added:

"They will trade no new milk this Summer for skins."

"No rum at the X. Y. post?" I incredulously asked.

The Indian, in a voice of deep disgust, repeated—

"No rum."

IF THIS news were true, I would have no rivalry during the Summer. To handle the trade without liquor was to fly without wings. I was glad that Red Dearness had gone away without requesting me to sell him a few kegs. Had he asked the favor, I should have granted it—not as a courtesy but as a protection against a possible time when the N. W. might need a similar favor. And yet, even if Dearness, because of sickness or haste to be gone, had neglected to tap our stock, why had not the clerk Angus come up for a few kegs?

"What were you doing at the X. Y. post?" I sternly demanded, remembering they had no business to take their hunt there.

"We took our goods there, as we were afraid of the Chippewas here, who had stolen our medicine," defended White Buffalo.

"If you could have traded for rum, you wouldn't be here now?"

They readily admitted this to be true.

"You have heard my promise about the Voice," I said. "You are not to be afraid of my Indians. You are to tell all your people, all the X. Y. Summer Indians, that there is plenty of strong milk here."

"We will bring our hunt here—all of it," he promised.

This new promise of trade pleased me immensely and I gave each of the men another dram and left them. I was anxious to have Flat Mouth's opinion on the stolen medicine.

"You have heard the Voice talking on the River That Calls?" I asked.

"Every one hears it who goes there."

"Have you heard that it has left the river?"

"It has left the river," he assured.

"Where is it?" I bluntly demanded.

"A strange spirit flies through the sky along the Pembina River above the fort. It makes a loud noise."

"A strange spirit? What foolish talk is this? How can you say that unless you have seen it?" I reproached.

"I have seen it," he astounded me by replying. "It floated on the water through the darkness and sang its medicine song."

"What did it look like?"

"Like a big white swan."

His hesitation before answering satisfied me this was a bit of imagination.

"The Pillager chief heard a loon cry and said it was a spirit," I scoffed.

"The loon has the voice of an evil spirit. Ugly, like the snarling of two foxes fighting."

By implication I was to understand that the strange spirit on the Pembina had a very sweet voice. This in itself was no clue for a white man to follow, for the senseless thudding of a war-drum is soothing and beautiful to the Indian ear. I was glad old Tabashaw and his people were back in the hills. Once they heard they held this mighty medicine Voice a captive, they would stop hunting and depend upon their prisoner to charm rum out of my strong room.

That night, after I had turned in, there came a pounding on the stockade gate. I ran out. It was White Buffalo who answered my angry challenge.

"Listen up the river, the Pembina," he requested in a trembling voice.

I turned my ear to the west. At first I heard nothing; then it came down the river to me. It was faint and far off, containing a wailing sweetness much like the soft passing of a bow over a violin. It was like nothing so much as a human voice without suggestion of spoken words. Rather a humming, moaning sound.

TO BE CONTINUED

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The Skull of Shirzad Mir

by H·A· LAMB

Author of "The Rider of the Gray Horse," "The Star of Evil Omen," etc.

What is written in the book of Fate no man may read.

The grave of the rider of the desert will be dug in the blue hills of Badakshan; he will not know it until the dark angel of death is at hand.

The astrologer may sit on his strip of carpet in the cupola of the temple and seek the wisdom of the stars in the night. But he will not see the hand with the dagger that rises behind him.

Mogul proverb.

THE sun was high over the Shyr Pass when Gutchluk Khan reined his horse in my path. It was the year 1608 in the calendar of the Christian priests and the year of the Ox by the reckoning of my people.

The Shyr Pass at this place is not wide, for one of the rivulets of the Amu Daria flows beside the caravan track. On either hand the willows and rocks press close. Likewise, Gutchluk Khan was a broad man, with a figure like a full sack of wine, and there were two with him. They carried bows and round shields, small and bossed with silver, after the manner of their race—the Uzbeks.

It is a saying of my master, Baber Shirzad Mir, who heard it said by the dead Mogul Akbar—on whom be peace—that, when in difficulty, put spurs to your horse and ride forward. It is well said. This thought came to my mind when I saw the turbaned bulk of Gutchluk Khan, and I pressed toward him, touching the hilt of my sword lightly with my free hand.

Gutchluk Khan was not the same man with a sword as with his speech. He watched, not pleased to stay where he was at the edge of the river but not wishing to rein back.

"Ho, Abdul Dost!" he cried loudly. "Whither go you?"

Speech is ever a trick of those who wish you ill. And I loved not the stout Uzbek, whose sword was too often for sale and who, in the year of the Ox, was numbered among the men of Jani Beg. Wherefore I pressed forward until the gold cloth at the peak of my saddle rubbed against the shoulder straps of his steppe pony.

Now I was at that time two-score years and lean. I have heard it said in the bazaars that I ride better than most and use my scimitar as well as any but a very few of the Mogul's picked *mansabdars*. Doubtless Gutchluk Khan knew this, and stout men are tender of injury.

He reined his horse to one side and his followers likewise. Yet when I had passed them so much as a horse's length I halted.

A thought had come to me. I was bound for Khanjut, where was my lord, Shirzad Mir. He was prisoner to Jani Beg. Gutchluk Khan had seen me and would follow if

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he suspected my horse's head was turned to Khanjut. He would doubtless be glad of an excuse to set his pig's face back toward the camp of Jani Beg, where were captive women and the musicians and wine of the Beg.

"I go," I said, "to Anderab to seek a new horse."

"Nay, Abdul Dost, your horse is good." His swine's eyes puckered at me. "It is one of the breed of Kabul. And you, truly, are a one-mount soldier."

It was true the horse was excellent. It was a gift of Shirzad Mir—may his soul have peace! Gutchluk lied when he swore I was a rider of one mount. Ten years ago, when Shirzad Mir was chieftain of Badakshan, the King of Kings, whose court was a heaven and who was a warrior to warm the heart, the Shadow of God, Akbar, the Emperor had given me the rank of *mansabdar* with the privilege of a double remount.

But Gutchluk Khan did not know this. Nor did I care if he knew. My heart was sore with thought of Shirzad Mir in chains and doomed to death.

"He is bred—" I patted the neck of Wind-of-the-Hills—"to take the road from mongrels."

"And from Moguls," chuckled Gutchluk Khan, who lacked not wit after a fashion. "He has learned that trick from his master. Aye, you and the other men of Shirzad Mir—those that still live—have earned the hatred of the all-powerful Jahangir, Mogul of India, whose whisper is a shout of command, even in these northern hills. Wherefore Shirzad Mir will die before sunrise tonight."

It was true that Jani Beg had so ordered. A boy shepherd had told me the news, down the pass.

"He will be slain," smiled Gutchluk Khan, "by a bowstring drawn taut around the neck. When he is dead, his head will be cut off. It will be emptied and the skull set in gold."

The two followers laughed, for they were three and I was one. Nevertheless they kept their bows in hand. I was very angry, and they had heard tales of my swordplay.

"The skull," mocked the Usbeg, "will be dried and will be a drinking-cup to fill with wine of Shiraz for the favorite of Jani Beg. The women will toy with it."

Gutchluk Khan was well pleased that he had angered me.

"Ho," he cried, waving his plump hand at me, "there will be rare sport when Jani Beg gives the order to hunt you down, Abdul Dost! He will fly his horsemen at you like falcons, and they will add your head to the minaret of skulls by the gate of Khanjut. But the skull of Baber Shirzad Mir, the Tiger Lord, he will keep for his women's delight."

THREE years ago Akbar the Great, Mogul of India, had passed to the mercy of God. He had been the friend of Shirzad Mir. Jahangir, Akbar's son, had little liking for us hillmen.

Besides, Jani Beg, the Uzbek, had spent much gold among the courtiers of Jahangir and had whispered that Shirzad Mir was a rebel who sought Badakshan for himself. Shirzad Mir was a proud man; he did not give up the kingdom when Jani Beg came—with Jahangir's consent—at the head of an army to demand it.

It was false that we had rebelled against the Mogul. But we were far from the court—and Jani Beg had spent much gold. We had done no evil. Only, we had not gone to the court, as the Uzbek did. It is written in our annals—the annals of Badakshan—that the screech of an owl in the wilderness is more pleasant than the song of the nightingale in the grove; the caves of the mountain-tops are finer than the cities of the valley.

When it was too late, we understood. But the word had gone forth that we had taken up arms against the Mogul, and those who were of faint heart deserted us.

As a last resort I had mounted and gone through the Uzbek lines, through the pass, to Kabul to seek the governor of the Mogul. But at Kabul I found Said Afzel, the son of Jani Beg, who had given the governor much silk, camels, brocades and slaves. I could do naught, being a man of slow speech, without a present in my hand.

It was then, when I rode back through the pass, I learned that Shirzad Mir had, to save the lives of his followers, surrendered Khanjut and appealed to the mercy of Jhangir.

But the voice of the Tiger Lord carried no further than the foot-hills of the Hindu Kush. That night he was to be slain.

Knowing these things, what answer had I to the gibes of Gutchluk Khan? It was an evil day.

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Even at the last Jani Beg and the courtiers who were with him had not kept faith with Shirzad Mir. They had promised him life, and they were making ready his death bed.

Verily, it came to my mind, when I heard the talk of the sheep-boy, that he who holds power under a prince should not be absent from the court. But it was too late.

If the Mogul had known the truth, it might have been otherwise. Aye, for his father was Akbar, who was a soldier. And a soldier understands justice.

It is written by the men of wisdom that he who sits down to the feast of life must end by drinking the cup of death. Yet the cup that was at the lips of Shirzad Mir was bitter as dregs of sour wine. For who wants to be branded a traitor?

Of this thought I said naught to Gutchluk Khan. Seeing that he was waiting for me to speak, I was silent. He watched me from owl-like, blinking eyes. He had the broad, hooked nose of the Uzbek men, but his face was heavy with flesh and his beard scrawny. Instead of the sheepskin saddle-cover that his tribe usually owned, his saddle glittered with jewels, and his *khalat* was silk. He had been at the sack of Khanjut after the surrender.

"When Shirzad Mir is dead," he said, changing his tone, "you will be a free man. Why not enter the service of Jani Beg? He has an eye for a veteran swordsman. And he has watched you among the defenders of Khanjut. Where else will you go?"

The thought came to me that Gutchluk Khan would like to wheedle me and so to carry my head to Jani Beg. I smiled and he said no more.

It was a fair sight, if I had been so minded—the valley of Shyr. The rivulet muttered nearly under our feet, down the steep bank. Overhead, through the thin arms of the willows, was the blue, blue sky of the hill country. On either hand rose the mighty peaks of the Hindu Kush with their pine garments and snow heads. *Hai*—it was well to feel the keen air of the higher levels after the hot dampness of the Kabul fields!

And then I saw that Gutchluk and his followers were not looking at me. Along the path in front of them had come two men.

No man—but only God—knows what lies before him. Here were two men on foot, and I had never seen their like before. None but peasants, shepherds and slaves walk afoot in my country. Yet these two had no horses.

Even the followers of Gutchluk Khan wore cloth of silver and had gems of sorts, such as turquoise, on the hilts of their scimitars. These strangers wore plain weapons of dull steel in leather scabbards and their swords were not curved but straight. The taller of the two had a cloak of dull brown with a plain metal clasp at the throat. Also boots of loose leather, such as the Tatars wear.

But he was no Tatar. His green eyes were level and his face was fair as a Circassian. His yellow beard and mustache were pointed. A plain ruffle of white cloth showed at his throat, which was bare. Instead of a turban he wore a small green cap with a long feather.

By these things I knew that the two were *Franks*, or *Ferangs*, called by the black Portuguese priests of Agra Christian Europeans.

I stared, for I had not seen a *Ferang* before. Nor had Gutchluk Khan and his men. The taller of the two strangers lifted his hand for speech. And Gutchluk Khan rode toward him slowly, afire with curiosity.

It came about by chance. The arrogant bearing of Gutchluk Khan must have alarmed the shorter man, who had the rough garb of a servant, very dusty and tattered. This man stepped in front of the khan with upraised staff.

"Put down the staff!" cried the khan harshly.

He was quick to mistrust—especially those who were strangers.

The man either did not understand or would not obey. He planted his feet doggedly and waited. His eyes shone from a dusty face. Gutchluk Khan spoke a quick word to his followers, and one of them fitted arrow to bow.

The shaft sped and I saw the feathers stick from the throat of the man with the staff, under the chin. He coughed and fell to his knees, spitting blood. Then he lay flat in the road, moving slowly.

The tall man gave an exclamation and stepped to the side of the servant. He bent over and touched the arrow; then he stood up, drawing his long sword.

In his face was distress for the man who

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had died. Yet it had been only a servant. The fellow had been a fool to threaten Gutchluk Khan with his staff.

"These men are foreigners and infidels," said the Uzbek loudly. I thought to myself that the religion of Gutchluk Khan was the faith of whatever lord he followed—Mohammedan, Uzbek or Hindu. "They mean no good; we will take the sword of the tall one with the yellow mane and carry it to Jani Beg, who will be pleased."

He made a sign to his two followers to close in on the stranger. The man threw back his cloak, resting his sword-point in the earth in front of him. He was not ill to look on, with his legs planted strongly, his straight body bending forward from the hips slightly and his head high. His face seemed drawn. Later I knew that he had not eaten for a day and night.

The slaying of the servant had not mattered; but this man had not the bearing of a common person. Moreover, it was one without armor, afoot, against three mounted and with mail vests. I reined my horse forward.

"Only a wild boar hunts in a pack, Gutchluk Khan," I said. "Do you meet this man alone? He bears himself well. There will be more honor if you take his sword in fair play. Dismount! A coward seizes advantage when he can: a brave man will deal fairly with an adversary."

THE pig eyes of the Uzbek glittered from me to the stranger. He liked my words little. I think it had occurred to him that if the three attacked the *Ferang* they would leave their backs open to me. And, as I have said, the Uzbeks know how well I use a sword.

He whispered to his men, who fell to eying me. I was within arm's reach and the way was narrow.

"If your servants slay the man and you take his weapon to Jani Beg, I shall tell the true story of what happened, Gutchluk Khan," I said again. "And the *bahadurs* of Jani Beg will make mock of you."

The words had their effect. The stupid Uzbek could not draw back now without disgrace. He scowled and whispered again to his men. Perhaps he urged them to put an arrow into me if chance offered. But it did not.

"So be it," he said with bad grace and sprang from his horse.

He was eager to gain honor by carrying the *Ferang's* weapon to his chief.

He dressed his round shield and drew his scimitar. That which followed was swift in passing and I saw it well—although I watched the two followers from the corner of my eye.

Gutchluk Khan ran against the tall *Ferang*, seeking to catch the other's sword on his shield and cut him down with a scimitar stroke. Shields are a clumsy thing, useful for defense, but—is not a good thrust the best defense?

The tall *Ferang* poised his long sword straight before him and warded aside the scimitar. I saw that he watched not the weapon of Gutchluk Khan but the Uzbek's eyes. That is the mark of a good fencer.

Truly, it was strange swordplay. The scimitar of Gutchluk Khan could not beat down the guard of the *Ferang*. And almost at once the *Ferang's* weapon thrust under the shield and bent sharply against the mail vest.

He gave an exclamation at that and turned his attention to Gutchluk Khan's neck. He was very cool and moved slowly; still, with good effect. Another moment and the straight sword had passed twice against Gutchluk Khan's fat throat, over the armor, and blood flowed freely.

The two followers shouted and Gutchluk Khan squealed like a hurt pig. He was afraid he was dying and the cuts had melted his courage, like snow before the sun of the desert of Khorassan.

With their shields the two covered Gutchluk Khan from the thrusts of the *Ferang* while the Uzbek ran to his horse and mounted. The khan spurred away up the path whence he had first come, followed by his two, without further heed to me. I laughed, for he had squealed just like a pig. They passed me at a gallop, going toward Khanjut.

"Lend me your horse and I will go after them," cried the *Ferang* to me, coming to the bridle of Wind-of-the-Hills.

I laughed again. To none save Baber Shirzad Mir or the mogul himself in battle would I render my horse.

He had spoken in broken *Mogholi*, a language which, in the spoken word, is my own. For writing, we use *Turki*.

"Nay," I answered in the same tongue. "You would be a fool. They would send

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an arrow through you, and—I have need of Wind-of-the-Hills. I ride to Khanjut tonight."

With that he glanced up the Pass after the three angrily. Almost, I think, he would have run after them afoot. Yet he should have been thankful that he was still alive.

Then he turned to the servant, who was dead by now. He lifted the man in his arms and I saw that his grave face was marked with grief. He glanced once at the stream; then he walked up the hillside a few paces to a great poplar tree. It was a noble tree, with wide branches. Here, using his sword and the servant's staff, he fell to digging a grave between the roots of the poplar, where the soil was soft and there was no grass.

I could not help him, for it is forbidden. I dismounted, taking food—dried prunes and rice—from saddle-bags. After washing in the stream, I sat and ate—after making the noonday prayer. It is well to pray and the hours of life that remained to me were uncertain. That night I was going to Khanjut—after that, who knows?

The *Ferang* did not cease his labors until he had hollowed out a hole sufficiently large to place the body in, when he doubled it up. Truly, that was an unwonted thing. The dead man had been a servant and the kites would have seen to the corpse. But the *Ferang* had unwonted thoughts.

When the grave was filled in with dirt, he brought several large stones, one after the other, and laid them on it so that the animals would not dig the body up. This done, he hacked a cross in the smooth bark of the poplar with his sword. He took off his hat and stood by the grave for the time that it took me to swallow four times.

It was a strange custom, even for a *caphar*—an unbeliever. The thought came to me that each race has its road to follow and at the end of the road, its shrine. I was meditating upon this and upon the skill with which the *Ferang* had used his straight sword when he came and stood by me.

Since then I have told many that the straight sword is a goodly weapon, but they would not believe—not having seen the *Ferang* use his.

"What was the name of the stout man who ordered my servant slain?" he asked.

I told him.

"He shall pay for what he did," he said.

He spoke directly, as he had thrust with his sword, in a clear voice that came from his chest as if he knew what it was to give commands to many men.

"Where has Gutchluk Khan gone?" he said again.

"To Khanjut."

He was silent, watching me eat. Then—"I have not had food for the space of a day and night," he said.

I made room for him beside me. He was a *caphar*, but a brave man. He ate very much. I gave him all the prunes and rice, because he was hungry and I did not know when I should eat again. When he had finished he sat back moodily.

Who was he? Where had he come from? What was his rank? I knew not. And three was the straight sword.

"Give me leave," I begged politely, "to hold your weapon in my hand. I have not seen the like."

He glanced at me quickly from his green eyes. Sitting shoulder to shoulder, he was my height, but broader through the chest and with more muscle on his forearms. His neck was round and firm and when he moved it was with the ease of one whose muscles are not slack. He had not put on his hat and the yellow hair curled around a broad, white brow. He was young—perhaps twenty-five.

"I heard what you said to Gutchluk Khan when the rascal was about to attack me with his two men," he said in his broken *Mogholi*. "For that I give thanks. Yet how am I to trust another with my sword? I have no other weapon." His voice fell and I thought I heard him mutter, "Nor aught else."

"You have eaten my bread and salt," I reminded him. "And he who has done that is safe from harm at the hand of the giver of salt."

He looked at me again and handed me the sword without another word. It felt strangely in my hand. It would have been hard to deal a good cut with it. Still, the steel was very fine. I thanked him.

"What is your name?" I inquired, for my curiosity had grown.

"Weyand."

"Wey-and," I repeated. "Is that all the name?"

He told me that he was called Ralph Weyand; that he had the rank of Sir, or *Ser* in my tongue; that he had come from the country of *Feranguistan*, from a very large tribe, the English.

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I had heard of them.

"Then you are a lord," I asked, not quite believing, for he had neither attendants, rich garments or horses, and the title of *er* is not less than the Persian *shah*.

"Nay," he said. "My rank is not more than that of khan among your people."

That was little enough. Still, Sir Weyand carried himself like one accustomed to command.

He was a sailor—by which he meant khan of a ship—and a merchant. That is, he had not come to India to trade for himself but to make easy the way for others. After he had said that I would not have talked with him further—for a merchant is but a getter of coins, and a seaman is a man without wealth or honor—had it not been for two things.

He had used his straight sword well; and I was still curious.

Why was a man of the sea walking afoot in the hills of the Hindu Kush? Why was a merchant come to the highland of Badakshan, instead of the cities of Hindustan—Agra, Delhi and Lahore? Also, how had he learned *Mogholi*?

He told me all, sitting back against a willow and speaking sadly. I harkened, for I did not plan to reach Khanjut until nightfall. As for Sir Weyand, he must have cared little what he did. His was a great sadness.

SIR WEYAND had been sent to India to the court of Jahangir by him who was the ameer of England. He had come, he said, in the service of his sovereign lord, the king. The English had a thought to make a company to trade with India. This they called the East India Company. They were merchants who knew something of fighting.

The *Ferang* had landed from his ship at Surat and had gone from thence to Agra. There he had presented himself at the court of Jahangir. But he had few attendants and fewer presents. That was not well. As I, also, had learned at Kabul.

Likewise, the *Ferang* made enemies. In those years the Portuguese were in favor with Jahangir — the Portuguese, whose priests and traders had come from Goa and were at Agra.

The Portuguese, said Sir Weyand, knew that if the English received permission to trade in India for the East India Company their own traffic would be hurt. I knew naught of merchants and their ways, but the *Ferang* said it and it may have been true.

The priests of the Portuguese had contrived to persuade Jahangir that the English were robbers. Sir Weyand was not granted a second audience. Some of his followers had died from illness; others returned to the ship.

Sir Weyand said the priests had tried to poison him. I know not. Priests, who are not warriors, may not be trusted. They had cut him off from his ship.

When Sir Weyand learned that Jahangir had been turned against him he sent a message to the Mogul that he would return to the Presence. He swore this on an oath—that he would return to the court and gain the right to trade for the East India Company.

Then he went into northern Hindustan with one servant and studied *Mogholi* with certain *kwajehs*—learned men. He had come to distrust the interpreter of the court. And so he mastered *Mogholi*. But the priests had tracked him, and because they were afraid, they were dangerous. The *Ferang* had been attacked by paid men; he had left Kabul to seek refuge in the hills.

That was his tale. Much I believed, for he spoke frankly; some I could not believe.

"How is it," I asked, "that the Portuguese, who are Christians, wish your death, when you are also a Christian? It is not fitting."

"In your religion, Abdul Dost," he replied after a moment, "there are many sects. Are they always at peace?"

"Nay."

"Neither am I at peace with priests of Agra. We are two sects. Likewise Portugal is bitter to the English."

"Then," I said at once, for here was a plain puzzle, "why does not the ameer of the English make war upon the ameer of he Portuguese and try the issue by the sword?"

"We do not seek war, but peace." The *Ferang* looked long and thoughtfully at the distant snow peaks of the Hindu Kush. "War, perhaps, will come; if so we will have the victory."

"Meanwhile," I pointed out, "the Portuguese hold the favor of the Mogul and you are an outcast from Hindustan, like the lepers of Kashgar—not otherwise."

This being true, he said nothing.

"What do you plan to do?" I asked.

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"In time," he said, "I shall return, as I have sworn, to the court of Jahangir, and the Mogul will hear my message."

Verily, this was strange. The *Ferang* had no thought of fate. It seemed that his fate was assured—as he was alone in the hills, his servant slain, without food or money. He had neither horse nor armor. Yet he spoke with conviction.

SOME have said that it was not fitting that I, a *mansabdar* and warrior, should be named Abdul—the man of books. This, like many other riddles, may have been one of the unseen ways of God. For I, by dint of fighting through many lands, had become a speaker of three languages; wherefore my account of the fighting in Badakshan in the year of the Ox has been written down by the Mogul's scribes in the annals of Mohulistan.

What is written is written. It was fate that brought Sir Weyand to me in the Pass of Shyr. And from this meeting was born the strange event at Khanjut that night.

Even as I had questioned the *Ferang*, he asked many things of me. And I told him what lay so heavy on my heart—the captivity of Baber Shirzad Mir, the Tiger Lord of Badakshan.

We were of an age, Shirzad Mir and I, although the *mir's* curling beard was gray and his hawk eyes set in wrinkles. We had fought from Herat to Samarkand against the neighboring Uzbeks of Turkestan.

Before dawn on the coming night Shirzad Mir was to be bowstringed. His wives had already been taken by Jani Beg, who was holding the women for the coming of his son, Said Afzel, from Kabul the next day or the day after. And Shirzad Mir had no sons.

"It was the will of God," I explained to the *Ferang*, who had listened closely, "that this heaviness should be laid upon us. No man may escape his fate."

"Then Shirzad Mir is a rebel—against Jahangir?"

I put my hand on my sword and scowled.

"Eh, *Ferang*," I said, being angry, "that is an ill word! You know not what you say. When a Mogul dies, the chieftains of the tribes send to pay fealty to the new Mogul—or they revolt. Shirzad Mir did not revolt. But Jani Beg had the first word to Jahangir at the court. He offered to take the hill-country of Badakshan from Shirzad Mir—who had not yet sent homage, the distance to Agra being great."

And I told him how our fortunes—the fortune of Shirzad Mir—had fallen. Again he listened.

"If Shirzad Mir could live," he said, "he might make his peace with Jahangir. The Mogul would forgive him the war for the sake of the *Mir's* service to Akbar."

I was silent. The *Ferang* knew not the ways of the court. Jani Beg had been clever. And he held Badakshan in the palm of his hand. Likewise, the memory of a Mogul is short.

"So you are going to Khanjut," went on Sir Weyand, "to make an effort to save your lord?"

"Nay," I said. "No man may escape his fate. Shirzad Mir will go to the mercy of God tonight and perhaps I shall keep him company. I shall ride in front of the gate of Khanjut and shout an insult to the men within. Riders will come forth, and of these I may slay several before I am slain. This will be an honor to Shirzad Mir. For there will be one man to strike a blow for him, even when his hour has come."

"Then you are a greater fool than I, Abdul Dost," he replied.

"How?"

"Because Jani Beg has the upper hand, you say it is your fate to die."

"It may be written that I shall slay the men at the gate of Khanjut and live," I pointed out.

"Your fate, Abdul Dost, lies with Shirzad Mir; if you are a true follower of his, you will try to save his life."

"It may not be."

I lay back and watched the white flecks of clouds moving across the blue, blue veil of the sky above the pine-tips of the hills. They were like foam flung from the muzzle of a horse. The *Ferang* was silent for a long time, perhaps the time that it takes milk to boil.

"What manner of place is Khanjut, Abdul Dost?"

Now Khanjut is the citadel of Badakshan, for the great city of Balkh has dirt walls and is not easily defended; the Pass of Shyr ends at Khanjut. Wherefore the citadel is called in the language of my people the Iron Gate—*Khalga Timur*. Caravans bound from Kabul to Kashgar and Balkh pass by it. It was built in the time of the

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first Mogul, of stone from the quarries, and it has walls to four times the height of a man. Also four towers built inside, to command the walls. It is a small fortress, made to be held by a picked army. And it had never been taken by storm.

"Jani Beg has made his camp within the walls," I said, "with fifteen hundred horsemen and as many more bazaar followers. An outpost is kept at the cliff gate. Sentries are on the walls at night."

"And where is Shirzad Mir kept?"

"In the tower by the hill."

So the sheep-boy had told me.

"Can the cliff be climbed?"

I laughed. Many had tried it during the siege. But the cliff is the height of many spears, facing the plain. Below it runs the caravan track. On the top—as those who climbed it learned—is dug a moat against the castle wall.

In the rainy season and in Summer, when the snows on the peaks melt, the water from the river beside which we sat is at the flood. God has given this fine water to Khanjut and Badakshan. It flows from its gorge into a covered way, built cleverly of brick, which leads into the citadel from the hillside of Khanjut. Thus, we have water for drinking and to fill the moat.

So much I told the *Ferang*.

"Is the stream at flood now?" he asked.

"Nay; it is the season of harvest, when the snows above have melted and the rain is not yet."

He sat near me, nursing his sword. I was fain to sleep, for I would need my my strength that night; but still he talked.

"Are any followers of Shirzad Mir within call, Abdul Dost?"

"Nay—save for old Iskander Khan, the Kirghiz, who with his two striplings of sons tends sheep on the mountain near Khanjut."

"He is a friend?"

"Aye. He fought in the siege of the citadel until the time of surrender; then he slipped away to the hills, with others. But he is old."

"Could you reach him by nightfall?"

"If it suited me."

"Has he cattle with his sheep?"

"Doubtless."

"And he loved Shirzad Mir?"

"All did," I answered, sitting up and thinking of the Tiger Lord, "who followed him and heard his voice ring out in battle."

"Where does Iskander Khan keep the cattle?"

"Out of eyeshot of the walls of Khanjut, or Jani Beg would have taken them. In the hills, an hour's fast ride from the citadel."

"Where goes the caravan track from Khanjut?"

"It passes under the cliff, fords the stream which flows down over the cliffs, and passes straight out into the plain."

"Does Iskander Khan keep his sheep and cattle at the right hand or the left of this pass?"

I was becoming angry with long questioning; yet there was a purpose in the words of the *Ferang*.

"As we leave the pass," I said, "Khanjut is close on the right hand, with the Amu Daria—the stream—on that side. Iskander Khan's *aul* is away to the left."

FOR a long space Sir Weyand stroked his sword in silence. Then he stooped and gather up a little dust in his hand.

"See you this dust, Abdul Dost?" he said, looking at me strangely. "By it, and the will of God, we may save Shirzad Mir this night."

I stared. The *Ferang* was a merchant and an unbeliever. How could he hope to do what the army of Jani Beg had not done —break into Khanjut?

"It may not be," I said.

We were two men with one horse, without firearms or food. The *Ferang* had spoken of Iskander Khan; but the Kirghiz was an old man, lacking strength to swing a sword. The two striplings of the khan were apt at herding, or perhaps a bowshot; still, they could not be reckoned on in a fight.

And it would take fighting and good sword-strokes to gain inside the walls of Khanjut. Once there, we would yet have to assault the tower wherein was Shirzad Mir. Also we could not know how many men guarded him. Even could we gain my lord, we three, horseless, would be pent within the walls. The dark of the coming night would not aid us overmuch, for there would be a clear moon.

"Nay," I said, thinking of these things, "it may not be."

"How far can you see in the moonlight, Abdul Dost?"

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"As much as a bowshot," I responded—for moonlight obscures outlines, as if you were looking through very fine silk.

"Then it may be done."

Surely, I thought, the *Ferang* could have no real plan—for what have moonlight and dust to do with the way into Khanjut? Still, he was not content.

"What will cattle do if they see danger approaching from a certain quarter and are not sure what the danger is?" he questioned.

"They will face toward it and prick up their ears. Then, if it is real danger, they will push together and lower their horns."

"Are humans so different from cattle?" he said, more to himself than to me. "And it has not rained for two weeks in this country."

I looked him full in the eyes.

"Have you a plan?"

"Aye," he said, "a plan."

And he told me what it was. I listened carefully. Truly, it was a strange thought that had come to him, sitting with me in the Shyr Pass.

When he had finished I remained silent for a long time. Then I asked why he was willing to do this thing.

"I am now without friends, Abdul Dost," he replied. "If we save Shirzad Mir, I will at least have one friend—nay, two." He smiled at me.

Later I came to understand that he looked further ahead than this, into the veiled future that only astrologers can pierce.

"Gutchluk Khan will warn Jani Beg that he has seen me, and they will guess that I come Khanjut tonight," I told the *Ferang*. "They will watch——"

"So much the better," he said and laughed, stretching his powerful arms. This was a good omen—that a man should laugh before battle.

"I will do as you say," I agreed. "It may be our fate——"

"Our fate, Abdul Dost, is in our own hands."

Whereupon we rose up and went to Wind-of-the-Hills, who was cropping grass near the grave. Sir Weyand mounted behind me and Wind-of-the-Hills carried double down the pass as far as the first villages which are around Khanjut.

Here we turned aside to the left, along paths known to me, and passed through the ravines that led to the *aul* of Iskander Khan. We went quickly, for time was short.

The sun had left the ravines and the shadows were long out in the plain of Badakshan that we could see through the willow groves when we came out on the encampment of the Kirghiz. He and his sons and daughter were at sunset prayers.

Iskander Khan took the bridle of my horse and greeted me warmly. His encampment was shrewdly placed to escape the eye of Jani Beg's foragers; the sheep lay about it among the trees and the ground was black with their dried droppings. Further out, at the edge of the plains, the two boys had left the cattle. Their ponies were standing at the door of Iskander Khan's tent.

When we had dismounted we ate food with Iskander Khan, who glanced curiously at the *Ferang* but asked no questions, knowing that I would explain in due time.

When the meal was done I talked to Iskander Khan alone, as had been agreed upon between me and Sir Weyand. I told him what we wanted done.

"It is to save the life of Shirzad Mir," I ended, "if God so wills."

Iskander Khan was silent for a very long time, because I had asked a great thing of him.

"*L'a iloha ill Allah*," he said at length. "For what Shirzad Mir has done for me, and what his father did for my father, I will do this thing."

"At the beginning of the third watch of the night," I repeated, "when the shadows of Khanjut's four towers fall across the caravan track—then is the time."

Again he promised. And the *Ferang* left the encampment with me. Darkness was falling; but who should know the paths of the Badakshan foot-hills better than I?

We pressed forward quickly, running at times, holding our words so they would not strike against our legs. Wind-of-the-Hills I left with Iskander Khan, for where we were going the horse could not take us. We went due east, crossing, in the second hour of the night, the caravan track of Shyr down which we had come, and entered the ravines on the further side. Here we began to climb, going up, up, until our breath came in pants.

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III

MANY to whom I have told these things have doubted at this point that what I said was true. This was because there were three weak links in the chain by which we hoped to pull Shirzad Mir free of Khanjut.

One of the weak links was Iskander Khan. We had put our trust in the old Kirghiz and risked our lives on his spoken word. If he should fail us, we should die. The other links were—my knowledge of Khanjut and the wit of the *Ferang*. If either did not serve us, the plan of Sir Weyand would fail, Shirzad Mir would be slain at dawn, after the banquet that Jani Beg was holding that night—and we would be dealt with likewise.

Another thing, we were not going to enter a citadel held by foolish Hindus or drunken Sarts, but by warlike Usbeks—and there are few better soldiers—and my countrymen of Badakshan who had joined the standard of Jani Beg.

So many who have heard this doubted. I also doubted at the time when we were climbing among the heights behind Khanjut. But Sir Weyand was full of cheerful words and I was ashamed to speak my doubts. Besides, we had agreed with Iskander Khan.

A horseman is at loss when afoot and I was leg-weary by the time we gained the precipice over the stream of the Amu Daria. Perhaps because of this, or because he was accustomed to command men, the *Ferang* assumed the leadership in spite of my better knowledge of the place.

Hail—it was a good sight when we stood on the cliff over the stream. In the east, in our faces, the full moon—that of harvest—rose among the tall cedars and poplars. The silver mistress of the earth rose into the sky and pointed her finger down into the ravine through which muttered the hidden little river.

Looking down the gorge, we could see in the distance below us the black walls of Khanjut and beyond, in the green haze, the plain of Badakshan. The four towers stood out against the haze and I thought of Shirzad Mir, who was making his final ablutions in one of them, the one nearest us.

We could not see the sentries on the walls. Still, they were there. Jani Beg was a careful leader, as I had learned to my cost. Afterward, I heard that because of the warning of Gutchluk Khan the guards had been doubled, and also the outpost in front of the one gate of Khanjut that looked out over the plain. Truly I have something of a name as a warrior in Badakshan, for all this they did on my account.

Higher rose the moon, until it topped the cedars across the gorge. We had gained our breath by now.

"It is the beginning of the second watch of the night—even later," meditated Sir Weyand. "Know you a path down the cliff?"

There was no path. But at a point near where we stood I had seen goats descend the precipice in my youth. We went down, helping each other as best we could. It was an evil half hour.

Once Sir Weyand's heavy shoes slipped and he clung to a ledge with his fingers until I could reach him. Another time I fell the length of two spears, being checked by a stunted tree. It bruised me badly and strained the muscles of one armpit.

Had it not been for the moon we could not have done what we did. Perhaps in daylight we would not have tried it. The green haze of the silver light concealed the perils of the way. *B'illah!* A man is not a goat!

When we sat at the bottom of the cliff, with our feet in the water of the stream, the sweat was running from my chin. Sir Weyand, having suffered no hurt, left me and returned bearing the trunk of a dead cedar.

"The second watch is two-thirds passed," I said, looking up at the stars.

I had had command of sentries in the night too often to be mistaken.

"Soon you will be cool," laughed the *Ferang*, who threw himself down by me to rest.

I doubt, however, if he was tired. The man had good muscles and carried his weight easily, whereas I was not used to climbing or walking.

He stripped the branches from the cedar with his sword. As he did so he sang to himself a deep song of his tribe which I did not understand. He was a strange merchant. No man of our bazaars would have climbed down the cliff of the Amu Darai or sung to himself when about to enter Khanjut in the face of the men of Jani Beg. I wondered how he would bear himself in

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what was to come, in Khanjut. I doubted then if he would see another sun—for in a skirmish a man must look out for himself and I must see to Shirzad Mir.

"Come," he said; "it is time to go forward."

So I rose, being stiff with my bruise, and stepped into the river, carrying one end of the cedar and he the other. It was not deeper than our waists, since this was the dry season.

The moon was almost directly over our heads when we came near the end of the gorge. Here we could see the walls of the castle plainly, some five bowshots in front of us. We could hear the sentries crying one to the other. And the shouting in the bazaars around the walls, where the camp-followers were feasting at Jani Beg's bidding.

Then we stepped forward and, stooping over, entered the covered way through which the stream ran into the moat of Khanjut—into the moat and under the wall to the great reservoir which stores water for Khanjut in time of siege.

The cedar floated in front of us and we gripped it. At times the water was over our heads, and these times we swam, holding the tree. Often we struck our heads against the brick above, for the tunnel was not large.

The current gripped us and thrust us forward into the dark. We went quickly down, down. Aye, we were little better than the big water-rats that swam away from us, as our wet clothing pulled at us and our swords tugged at their girdles.

The worst was when we came to the arch that marks the wall of Khanjut. Here the tunnel closes down on the water and we were thrust under the surface. It was an ill moment. The cedar caught and we left it, swimming forward. Sir Weyand caught me and jerked me with him, for he swam well.

The evil passed. As I had known we must, we rose up through the water presently to the surface of the reservoir and caught our breath with great gasps. The *Ferang* drew me with him until our hands touched stone and we sat on the side of the cistern where the women come with their water-jugs.

The tank was built after the Hindu fashion, roofed over, with stairs and balconies leading down to the water. Thus it provided a cool spot in the hot season. We waited not to rest but climbed the steps and passed through the galleries until we stood at the door, where were some women looking out into the street. They were wringing their hands and clutching at their hair.

"What has come upon us?" I asked them, for I heard horses galloping about the courtyards.

I was glad of the dark, for my face is known in Khanjut.

"It is the enemy," they cried. "The sentries have sounded the call. Some men of Shirzad Mir, led most like by the accursed outlaw Abdul Dost, are at hand."

These words told me we were late. I signed to Sir Weyand and ran forth into the streets, keeping in the shadows and avoiding the torches some horsemen carried. Following back alleys, I came to the tower where I had heard Shirzad Mir was.

Before the door of the tower a hulking Kurd leaned on his spear. He stared at the form of the *Ferang*, who was close on my heels.

"Gutchluk Khan has sent for us," I cried quickly, lest he become suspicious, "to come here. Where is Jani Beg?"

"With the horsemen at the gate," answered the Kurd, still looking at the *Ferang*. "Gutchluk Khan is within, watching from the tower."

"Doubtless he is guarding Shirzad Mir," I said calmly, for this thing I needed to know.

"Two men guard the *Mir* before the door on the third landing."

I think the man—although he could not see our faces—was ill at ease. Yet we were going into the tower and not out, and Gutchluk Khan was within. So we pushed past him and began to climb the stair, for there was no time to be lost. Already we were late.

We climbed up in silence. I was listening to the clatter outside the tower. Men were crying and running about. There was much noise. Plainly the Uzbeks had been alarmed. And our period of grace was nearly over.

Embrasures in the walls lighted our path up. But at the second landing Sir Weyand checked me and pointed from the embrasure.

We were now higher than the walls of Khanjut. Beyond the walls and the roofs of the buildings we saw the plain. Over it lay the haze of moonlight.

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And far out on the plain we saw a great cloud of dust. It was moving nearer to the gate of Khanjut, coming from the west and circling. In the dust we caught a flicker of light here and there, reflected on something hard—also streamers that might have been attached to spears. In front of the cloud of dust a horseman was wheeling.

IN THE plain below us Jani Beg's men were gathering in ranks as they emerged from the pathway that led down at one side of the cliff. They formed swiftly. Jani Beg was a good leader. Our time was short. Already one or two horsemen were riding out toward the dust.

Sir Weyand noted all this and turned to me.

"Iskander Khan has kept his word," he said.

I thought to myself that Iskander Khan would never see his cattle or his sheep again. It was the reflection of moonlight on their horns we had seen and the streamers in the dust were rags tied to the horns of bullocks. The rider in front of the herd was one of the boys of Iskander Khan.

Truly, the stripling made a brave show—although we could barely see him at that distance. He must have shot arrows at the horsemen who were coming out, for they hesitated, waiting for the main body of Uzbeks to come up.

It is written that the faith of a true man is firm as steel. Sorrow came upon Iskander Khan for that night's work. Did he not render the service, however, to Shirzad Mir?

So far the plan of Sir Weyand had borne fruit. While the eyes of the Uzbeks were all turned to the plain, we were in the tower. And on the landing above, thanks to the confusion which had followed sounding the alarm, there were only two men.

They were sitting on their haunches, two mail-clad Uzbeks. But they sprang to their feet at sight of the *Ferang* running up the steps. Here was no time for talk.

I drew my scimitar and struck at the first man, leaping to the landing at his side. He warded clumsily and my second stroke bit deep into his neck through the shoulder muscles. He sank to his knees.

The *Ferang*, I saw, was engaged with the second man, his long sword thrusting silently at the fellow's neck. The shouts below drowned the dull mutter of steel against steel. I had seen the *Ferang* use his weapon and I wasted no time in turning from him to the door.

Two strong bars were in place. These I pulled down and threw open the door.

Within, a broad figure rose to its feet from kneeling over a wash-basin. My heart rose in me as sap rushes up a tree in Spring. For here was Shirzad Mir, clad in the clean garments in which he was to go to his death.

I caught his hand, while he stared, and touched it to my forehead. God gave me great happiness in that moment!

"Come with us, Lord of Badakshan," I cried. "We have little time."

Behind me I heard the second man fall to the floor. Shirzad Mir lacked not wit. In a second we had passed out of the door.

I looked for the *Ferang* but he was not to be seen. Shirzad Mir and I could not wait. We were obliged to be free of the walls of Khanjut before Jani Beg's horsemen should discover the trick we had played on them and rein back toward the castle. And there was but one gate.

Verily, I was rejoiced to see the curling beard and stout figure of my lord. The Kurd spearman at the tower entrance gave no trouble. Before he could turn I had struck him once with the flat of my sword under the ear and he fell to earth like a stricken ox.

Nevertheless, we waited at the tower gate while a man could drink a beaker of wine slowly.

"There was one with me, lord," I explained to Shirzad Mir.

"Then we must wait," he said, being an upright man.

The skin prickled up and down my back while we lingered, for it was foolhardy of the *Ferang* to delay.

Then he came and I nearly struck him, for he had put on an Uzbek turban. It was well, though, for when we ran from the tower and sought out two horses which I had marked in the courtyard near by none of the Uzbeks noticed him. One horse Shirzad Mir mounted. The other I gave the *Ferang*, running by his stirrup from the courtyard to the outer gate.

I had feared that Gutchluk Khan would have seen us from the tower. No one challenged us, however, as we fled through the gate among the scattered horsemen. In a night alarm there is much confusion and no man knows his neighbor.

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At the bottom of the cliff path we left the horsemen and struck through the camp bazaar, where there was great outcry and running about of women and slaves. I was watching for a horse to seize. None was to be had; yet on the edge of a village I spied a *kulan*—a wild ass. This, being desperate, I seized and mounted.

Then I rode after Shirzad Mir, who was leading the way into the ravines.

Truly, many have laughed at me when they heard I had ridden a wild ass to safety. Nevertheless, few have ridden such. It was no easy matter to stick to the beast's back.

Shirzad Mir was laughing at my riding. Perhaps I did cling to the *kulan's* neck. Who would not? It was I who led the way into the forest of the hills back of Khanjut. We rode until the night was spent.

Then, in the dawn, which is the blessing of light, we dismounted in a grove and stretched on the ground. Shirzad Mir was still laughing at my riding. To take his mind from that and to satisfy my curiosity, I asked Sir Weyand why he had risked our lives by delaying at the tower.

The *Ferang*, who was lying beside me, stretched his arms over his head.

"I went to find Gutchluk Khan," he said.

"Did you find him?" asked Shirzad Mir, watching him, for, despite the turban, he had noted the strange dress of the *Ferang*.

"Aye," said Sir Weyand and threw the turban from him. "That was his."

THE TALE OF THE TRUTHFUL COOK

by ROBERT V. CARR

THE old-time western cook, his tale:
"Oh, listen, boys, to me;
And I will now a truthful yarn
Unwind and tell to thee.
'Twas in the Fall of Eighty-two,
When to my camp there came,
A dead-eyed, shootin', wicked cuss,
And Rattlesnake's his name.

"Says he to me, 'Git busy now
And warm me up some chuck;
And make it quick and plenty hot,
Or you are one dead duck!'
Says I to him, 'I have no wood,
Nor chips that I can burn.'
Says he to me, 'It's cook or die;
Your gab hain't worth a durn!'

"I see right then I'm in a fix;
And so I slice some meat,
And slap it in a skillet cold,
The bad man's game to beat.
I then a prairie fire starts,
It was right sudden done;
The wind was high, and with my meat,
I follers on the run.

"I lope fer miles before I turn
That meat fer Rattlesnake,
A-follerin' the line of flame
That swept o'er flat and brake.
And 'fore I turns that meat again—
Truth's rope I never slack—
I'm forty miles from camp, b'gosh!
And never did go back."

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No Evidence

by L·PATRICK GREENE

Author of "The Snakes of Zari," "The Bound Twigs," etc.

JOHNSTONE, the native commissioner and magistrate of the Lydenburg District of the Transvaal, was very tired and cross. The day had been unusually hot, and he had tried many cases. Most of them were of a trivial nature: natives traveling without a permit, out after nine o'clock—and such petty misdemeanors. One case was so much like the other, and yet each had to be treated differently, with an understanding and a fatherly regard for the backslider.

At least such was the way in which Johnstone tried the natives who came before him. He was conscientious, almost to a fault, and always made it clear to the native in what way he had broken the laws and tried to convince him that the punishment meted out was a just one.

The entrance of two plain-clothes men, escorting a third white man, caused the commissioner to forget his tired feeling. He looked up expectantly and eyed the prisoner with interest. The latter's appearance was baffling. His smooth, round, clean-shaven face wore an almost vacuous look, an impression that was strengthened by the monocle which he wore in his right eye. His eyes, however, were steady, cool, and indicated great reserves of brain and will-power. The smoothly brushed hair and natty attire were those of a dandy, but his carriage was that of a trained athlete.

"Well, they have got you at last then, major," said the commissioner. "You are in the same plight as the pitcher that went to the well too often, and now you are going to be jugged. Yes, I foresee it is going to be my pleasant duty to send you away for a long rest."

"Oh, I say, old top, that's a ripping joke. Pitcher to the well, and now is to be jugged. I didn't think you had it in you," replied the major. If he had any other name it was not known in Africa, the land of aliases. "But aren't you, well, putting the cart before the horse? Here you talk about sending me away and you haven't even heard the charge. Let me tell you that it just won't do, you know. Here was I talking quietly with my native servant when these two Johnnies arrested me on some ridiculous charge or other. Imagine it! Arrested me right on the public street. Think of my reputation."

"Yes, I'm thinking of just that thing, major," the commissioner responded dryly. "What is the charge, officer?"

"Just as he says, sir, I. D. B. (Illicit diamond buying.) We saw a native accost the major just outside Joburg Smith's saloon. They talked for a little while and then the major gave the nigger some money and the nigger handed over a diamond. We arrested the major at once and brought him right here. The nigger got away. Not that that matters, for we got the major."

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"Prisoner, what have you to say?"

"I tell you that it's all positively ridiculous. These two dear chaps must be suffering from the sun. You look a little warm yourself, if I may say so. Diamonds! Well, if they're so sure of what they say, why don't they search me and produce the evidence?"

"Yes, that would be a good plan—pardon the omission. Search him, officers."

Carefully and methodically the two detectives went over the major. As they searched, the joy at having captured such a famous character red-handed faded from their faces, to be superseded by looks of blank amazement. Twice they went over him from head to foot, searching every seam of his clothing, deaf to the major's caustic offers of assistance.

"Say, old dears, wouldn't you like to give me an emetic? I may have swallowed the bally thing, you know."

Finally the men gave up their search in disgust.

"It's not on him, sir," said the senior detective in a bewildered tone.

"Of course it's not. I told you that you were making a mistake when you arrested me, but you were so bloomin' pig-headed you simply wouldn't listen."

"That will do," said the commissioner curtly. "But don't forget, major, about the little fable of the pitcher. Case dismissed for lack of evidence."

"Thanks for the little sermon, old top. If I ever am tempted to try my hand at I. D. B., I'll notify these two gentlemen—" bowing to the detectives—"I'm sure they would keep me in the straight and narrow 'path. They are so deucedly clever."

When he had left the court room the two detectives heatedly discussed the cause of their failure.

"I don't see how he possibly could have got rid of it. The nigger handed him the diamond; we can swear to that, and we watched every move he made on the way here, besides holding on to his arms. He must have dropped it on the way, or——"

The detective's hand was in his pocket feeling for a match. His fingers closed on something hard. Slowly withdrawing his hand, he held the object up in front of him. It sparkled in the sunlight.

"Well, I'm jiggered, what do you know about that?"

THE major was resting at Joburg Smith's place, having recently returned from a successful labor-recruiting trip.

He was generous and open handed when in funds, and a down-and-outer could always be sure of a stake from the major. So, when "Cockney Joe" asked to speak with him alone, he put his hand in his pocket——

"How much?"

"Gorblimme, guvnor. You ain't arf quick on the tike up. Wite a jiffey, Hi ain't beggin'. Hit's hinformation I'm selling."

"Really! Do you think you have information that will interest me?"

"Ow, come dahn orf ye —— perch and listen to this."

He whispered fast and furiously, the major listening first with amusement, then with keen interest.

"Oh, come now," he said when Cockney Joe had finished, "you don't expect me to believe that fairy-story."

"But it's Gawd's trewth, major."

"Well, let's hear it again, and speak louder; we are all alone. Oh, yes, and please try to speak a little more distinctly. Your dialect is so beastly thick I can almost smell London."

"Yus, an' hit's back there Hi wish I was now. I'm sick of this 'ere Gawd's country. 'Owever, you want my story again. Hand it's true, I tell yer, major. A hold nigger put me hin on the ground floor three years ago. Magato 'as set 'is bleedin' 'eart on gettin' a machine gun. There's a calabash full of diamints waitin' for the bloke what can run a gun through to 'is country. Diamints that 'is young men stole from the mines.

"Has I told yer, Hi 'ad a try at it meself but the cartridges didn't fit the gun, an' Magato nearly 'ad my life. Seems 'e 'ad seen the Portugeese practise with theirn and 'ad bought twenty goats for them to use as targets. The wily old cove says 'e won't tike a gun unless hit'll kill twenty goats, sime as the Portugeese's done. My, but 'e lost 'is bloomin' rag when my popper wouldn't work. Threatened to flay me alive—me a white man!

"An' then the old skinner showed me the sparklers, enough to fill a quart measure, just to let me see, 'e says, wot Hi 'ad missed by bein' a liar and a fool. Hordered his blink'n' soldiers to tike me hover the

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border and promised to kill me on sight hif I entered hit again. That's w'y I'm telling you. If 'e 'adn't said that, yer can bet your sweet life Hi would try it again. Now ain't that worth somethink, major? A fortune for the asking, so to speak."

"Yes," drawled the major, "it's all very interesting and very easy, as you say. However, you overlook one or two trivial details. But your story was pretty and nicely told, so here's twenty-five quid. Now hop along, old chap; it wouldn't do for me to be seen with you. Your reputation is—ah—unsavory, and the officials might arrest me on the premise that 'birds of a feather'—eh, what? But, by the way, if I do go and get the diamonds, I'll give you a quarter share."

SIX months later a small canvas-topped wagon, drawn by four oxen, stopped at the store of John Myburg.

"Outspan down by the trees, Jim," a voice directed the Hottentot driver.

The long whip cracked and the wagon lumbered on, soon to come to rest again in the shadow of the trees. Here the Hottentot outspanned and turned the oxen loose to graze. Then, going to the wagon, he took out and set up a portable wash-stand, which he filled with water, and then hung, near by, a small mirror. Not until then did the owner of the voice show himself and begin to lather his face preparatory to shaving.

"This shaving is a beastly bore, Jim," he said in English, "but one has to do it or lose caste."

"Yah, *baas*," said Jim as if fully comprehending and, squatting on his haunches, he watched his master shave, as if it were some religious rite.

"The man from the store is coming, *baas*," he said presently. "He looks like a pig. He is so fat that the grease drips off him."

The man did not answer; he was busy rounding his chin.

"He grunts like a pig as he walks, *baas*," Jim continued, "and his eyes are evil—there is no truth in them."

The shaving operation was over and the men turned round to face the storekeeper, who was now close at hand.

"Good day, major," said Myburg in Dutch.

The major was taken aback for a moment. He had hoped that he would meet none who knew him on this trip. He feigned not to understand, hoping that he would thus be spared the necessity of answering the numerous questions that a man of Myburg's type would be sure to ask.

"So you do not speak the *taal*," said Myburg in English.

"Oh, I didn't mean you to think that. It was that your speech was indistinct. I have the same trouble in understanding my boy Jim at times. He speaks the *taal* with a burr something like yours," drawled the major.

Myburg turned an angry red under his swarthy skin. The major's remark hit him hard, for it was rumored that he had Kafir blood in him.

"What are you doing up this way, major?"

"Oh, I thought that I would try a little trading trip. You fellows seem to make so much money at selling things to the simple nigger that I thought I would try it myself. So far I've had bally bad luck. I wish you would come and look over my stuff. Perhaps I haven't got the right things to trade."

Together the two men went to the wagon. Myburg's shifty eyes took in the contents almost at a glance.

"Well, what do you think of my stock?"

"*Alamachtig!* If it is to the good Boer *vrouws* you would trade, then have you got stuff that is good. But, man, who told you that a harmonium and a lot of squiffers (concertinas) was good trade with these —— niggers? The niggers up in this man's country ain't got money enough for things of that sort."

"But I was told that musical instruments were very good trades."

"Music, the man says! Yes, a jew's-harp maybe, yes, but harmoniums and concertinas—it is to smile."

"Then I may as well go back, you think?" said the major mournfully.

"Well now, there is no need for that maybe. You come up to my place. I'll fit you out with the proper stuff."

"That's jolly decent of you, considering I'm poaching on your preserves."

"Oah! I'd just as —— soon sell to you as to the niggers. Come on up now—scoff's ready."

When they had seated themselves at the table in the room at the back of the store,

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two native women brought in the food and then sat at the table. The major rose to his feet and looked expectantly at Myburg.

"*Voor den donder!* What ails you now?" burst out the storekeeper. "Oh, I see," he added with a sneer. "Get out of here, you black sluts, thy presence is an offense to this white man."

After the meal the major spent much time and money in purchasing articles recommended by Myburg as having good sale among the natives, ignoring the fact that the storekeeper was charging him exorbitant prices. When the bargaining was over he said—

"Now I must get down to the wagon and turn in, for I want to get away before sun-up tomorrow."

"Let your Hottentot bring your blankets up here. Stay and split a bottle. A bed-mate I will get for you." He leered evilly.

"Jim was right," said the major. "You are a pig. I suppose you can't help that, but please don't try to run me in with your litter."

NEXT morning the major, eager to inspan and get on trek, called in vain for Jim.

"He's probably up at the piggery buying some snuff, and Myburg's trying to pump him. I suppose I had better go after him," murmured the major. As he drew near to the store, he heard Jim speaking—

"I tell thee that I know nothing, *baas*."

"Dog of a liar, whose mother was a snake! Here I have given thee *maninge puza*—three tots of whiskey have I given thee, and what do you give me? Nothing but lies. Tell me, or I will beat the hide off thee, whither and for what purpose goes thy *baas*?"

"I have told thee that I know nothing save that we go, perchance, to Magato's land to trade."

"How will ye trade there, for well ye know, and thy *baas* knows—for all that he plays the fool—that it is death for a white man to enter Magato's land unbidden, unless— Now tell me truly, what will thy *baas* trade? Guns?"

"Nay, how can that be? He carries none save his own."

"Liar!"

The *sjambok* was raised and came down with a swish on Jim's naked back. The arm rose again, but before it could descend the major had wrenched the *sjambok* out of Myburg's hand.

"Get back to the wagon, Jim," the major said, "and inspan. We trek within an hour."

When Jim had left the store, the major faced the angry but cringing Myburg.

"Now, you cur, I'm going to give you a taste of your own medicine. Of course I could have you arrested for giving liquor to a native, but I'm afraid there's not enough evidence to convict you."

The major chuckled at a sudden memory.

"Will you stand up and fight? I thought not. You haven't the pluck of a louse. Well, take this, and this, and this!"

At the first stroke of the *sjambok* Myburg whimpered; at the second he howled for mercy, at the third he groveled on the floor. The major, in disgust at the craven spirit of the man, tossed the *sjambok* to the ground and strode to the door.

"Just a moment, major. I was a bit hasty with the Hottentot. I ought to have known better than to interfere with another man's nigger. But there's no hard feelings, is there now?"

"Well, what is it?" said the major curtly.

"Oh, come now, don't be harsh. Perhaps I can help you. One of my women is from Magato's country."

He watched the major closely.

"Well, what is that to me?" The major lapsed into a drawl—silkily menacing.

"Oh, I can see through your game. Running guns through to Magato. I don't blame you. The reward's a big one. Oh you're slim, *verdoemte* slim, but you can't put this through without me. I have been there and I know Magato. Och, sis man! I tell you that I have even seen the diamonds. Five years ago I saw them when I took him a gun."

"You took him a gun? Then you have the diamonds. I congratulate you."

"*Stilte!* I took him a gun, yes, but it was no proper one—where would I obtain such a thing? And I did not get the diamonds. The wily old *schelm* wanted to see the gun work, and of course it wouldn't. Now you, you will be killed if you go into Magato's country. But me, I tell you man I can come and go just as I please, and any one who is with me is safe, too."

"Go on—you interest me."

"I thought I would." Myburg was growing confident. "Take me with you, major, on equal shares."

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The major laughed.

"Yes, you interest me, Myburg. You are such a fool, so full of romantic visions—diamonds and gun-running and sudden death. You have seen my wagon, but did you see any signs of a machine gun? Or perhaps you think I carry the bally thing in my pocket. What distresses me, though, is that you take me for a fool, too. You know the penalty for gun-running—twenty years on the Breakwater at Cape Town. Who's going to risk that for a mess of diamonds? But what annoys me most of all is that you entertain the idea that I would go into a partnership with you."

Turning abruptly on his heel, the major returned to his wagon. Jim had inspanned and with shouts of "Ah now, *schelm!*" and the cracking of the whip they were once more on trek.

Myburg watched them from the stoop of his store—every now and then shaking his fist in anger at the retreating wagon.

"I must have been wrong," he muttered. "At any rate they are not headed for Magato's country now. That is due north, and they are traveling west. But that swine needs watching. He is tricky. And *alamachtig!* How strong he is!"

LEISURELY the major trekked from *kraal* to *kraal*, trading with the natives the articles that he had purchased from Myburg.

On the fourth day, when they were about an hour's trek from a large *kraal*, the major took an aniline pencil and covered his face, hands, and all the visible parts of his body with spots.

In answer to Jim's look of fear when he saw his *baas* so strangely marked the major said:

"Do not be afraid, Jim, it is but a game. When we come to this village, ye will ask the people to bring us much food. Say that thy *baas* hath the smallpox and would go away from all, that he may not pass on the disease."

At the *kraal* Jim faithfully carried out his instructions, with the result that when they had brought the required provisions the people besought the major to hasten from their village.

"Go ye from us, white man, lest the great spirits afflict us also."

The major chuckled as he saw his plans working out as he wished and resumed his trek. But from this time on he traveled due north toward Magato's country.

At Jombo's village, the last on the Transvaal side of Magato's land, the major met with stern opposition. Jombo, the headman, refused to let him get water.

"The great spirits," he said, "have marked thee for death. Who then am I to give thee water, that ye may cheat the spirits a while longer?"

As the major had a long, dry trek before him, it was imperative that he should get water, and he finally won over Jombo by presenting him with a rifle. Three days later he set off on the last lap of his journey.

By means of his native spies Myburg was kept well informed of the major's movements, and his joy knew no bounds when one of them told of the dreaded disease that had attacked his enemy. He poured out a stiff tot of whisky for the messenger.

"Ye say the white man is smitten with the evil spirit that eats away the flesh?"

"Yea."

"Art sure of this?"

"With my own eyes I saw him."

Myburg chuckled.

"The swine! Well am I avenged. He will die the death of hunger and thirst, for the people will refuse to deal with him. Every hand will be against him."

"Ay, that is true, O keeper of the store. He, knowing that, hath purchased much corn—paying heavily for it—intending, he says, to dwell near unto the border of Magato's land. Thither he even now is trekking."

"What say ye?" Myburg asked fiercely. "He treks toward Magato's land, say ye? Fool! Why told ye not that before? He hath tricked ye. No disease hath he, but is cunning even as the Jackal."

"Nay, how can that be? It was no trick. I myself saw his face, and it was all spotted."

"Spotted, say ye? Nay, the spots are in thy eyes, blinding thee to the truth. But it is no great matter. I now hold him in the hollow of my hand. He shall learn that I have indeed no small influence with the people of Magato. Saddle the black horse and hasten, for I ride far.

"*Alamachtig!* Who would have thought the cursed *roinek* with his womanish voice could be so *verdoemte* slim."

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"*Bona lapa* — see, *baas*, men on horseback follow us!"

The major looked back over the plain and could discern a cloud of dust which gradually grew larger and nearer. Even as he watched, the cloud developed into two horsemen riding furiously.

"Um!" he mused. "Some one after me. Well, they are too late, whoever they may be. Another hundred yards or so and we'll be in Magato's country. They can't touch me there—not legally anyway.

"Hasten, Jim."

The long whip cracked and in response to it and Jim's shrill cries, the oxen responded gamely, breaking into a slow lumbering trot. When they were well over the line that marked the boundaries of Magato's country, the major called a halt. He lit his pipe, affixed his eye glass and waited for the horsemen to overtake him.

"Well," he drawled as they drew near, "if it isn't my good friends, Sergeant Blake and Trooper Barton, of the police."

The horsemen rode up to the wagon, dismounted and advanced, covering the major with their revolvers.

"This is a pleasant surprize," he said as he rose to greet them. "But why the poppers?"

"Oh, cut out your rottin', major. We've got you this time. You're under arrest."

"Under arrest? Me? Why what—?"

"Of course you would play the innocent, but you know why—gun-running."

"Oh! You mean because I gave that gun to old Jombo. That's a good one." He laughed boisterously. "Why that—"

"Don't trouble to explain. We know the gun was useless, barrel sawed through, ejector removed and all the rest."

"Then why all this?"

"Listen to him, Barton," said the sergeant. "Isn't he a ducky? You'd never think he had a maxim gun hidden in that wagon, would you? Don't play the injured innocent, major; we know all about it. You see Cockney Joe was arrested—just drunk and disorderly—and was tried before Johnstone. He told the commissioner how you had given him money for information received and it didn't take the commissioner long to find out what that information was. Since then we've been watching you pretty closely, though I must admit you threw dust in our eyes when you faked smallpox. But we've got you now, all right."

"You chappies weary me," drawled the major. "Pon my soul, but you're as bad as Myburg. Can't a fellow go on a trading trip without your blasted interference? It's perfectly monstrous. I'll write to the papers about it. And anyway, even if all you said was true, you can't touch me here."

"No? We're two to one and we've got you covered. Hey, boy! Swing round the oxen; we're going back. And be quick about it, too!"

Jim looked at the major for confirmation of the order. The major nodded absently, but no sooner had the order been obeyed than he called a halt.

"Look here, you fellows, I don't see why I should go back with you. It's a beastly bore coming all this way for nothing and then having to go back—also for nothing. It's just occurred to me that you'd better produce this machine gun that you talk about so glibly. Otherwise I don't budge."

"All right, if you must make trouble. Keep him covered, Barton. I'll soon find the evidence."

The sergeant climbed up into the wagon and searched carefully but fruitlessly.

"It's no good, Barton," he finally called. "We're bilked again. I believe the man is a fool after all. And yet—"

"Oh, come now, sergeant, don't be peevish. I don't blame you. It's all the fault of the commish. The dear, silly man has got it into his head that I'm a bad character and is always seeing evil where it ain't, as Cockney Joe would say. Speaking of Joe, I'd suggest that in the future you discard any evidence given by drunks. How about scoff? I'm deucedly hungry. Will you join me?"

"Might as well. What do you say, Barton?"

"Righto, sergeant. And, seeing how near it is to sundown, can't we camp here for the night? There's water just beyond the bushes yonder, the boy says, but this is the better place because we are freer from mosquitoes here."

Jim outspanned the oxen and drove them down to water, leaving the two horses. When he returned he found that the white men were commencing their meal. The horses he tethered to the pole of the wagon, leaving the oxen to graze until he had had his scoff.

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THE meal over, Barton peered curiously at the trade stuff which cluttered up the wagon while the other two men sat on the cushioned seat in front—the major traveled luxuriously—and smoked.

"You seem to specialize in musical instruments, major."

"Yes—I expect to make a good trade for them with Magato's people."

"You're going on, then?" asked the sergeant.

"Of course, why not?"

"A harmonium, by all that's wonderful," exclaimed Barton. "Haven't played one for years. Mind if I give you a tune?"

"It's out of order, old chap. The bellows won't work. I've been meaning to fix them."

"I'll fix 'em now for you. I always was a dab at fixing things."

"Don't bother—"

A cry from Jim put a stop to further conversation.

"Soldiers of Magato are coming."

The major, followed by the two policemen, got down from the wagon and awaited developments. Coming at a run toward them was a scouting party of about twenty natives, armed with *assegais* and old-fashioned muzzle-loading guns—the latter likely to be more dangerous to the users than to those in front of them. Eighty paces distant the party halted and held an excited conference. Then one, the leader, advanced alone.

"Let me handle this," said the major. "I have the language better than either of you.

"Greetings, O man of Magato, by what name shall I know thee?"

"Ye may call me Tapa. But in truth I come not to bandy words with thee. What make ye in Magato's country?"

"I do but come to trade, O man of might."

"Know ye not the order of the king, that no white man may stay in his country?"

"Yet have I the thing he greatly desires. Ye know well of what I speak."

"Ye mean that which speaks with many tongues?"

"Aye, even that."

Then, in response to the looks of the policemen, the major added in English:

"The dear fool is talking about a Maxim too, I suppose. Well, a harmonium has many voices, too."

"If ye say that, ye lie, white man, and think not that by lies ye can avert the wrath of Magato the King."

"In what way have I erred, O Tapa?"

"Do ye still bandy words? We know well that thou art sent hither by the white men to spy out the land and to afflict the people with the disease that eats away the flesh."

"That is folly. See, with the chalk did I make the spots, so fooling the people in the country beyond. I tell thee also that I spoke not lies but truth concerning the other matter."

Tapa stood as though undecided what move to make; then he turned toward his comrades, seeking inspiration. In answer to his unspoken appeal, a voice cried from among the group of natives:

"Believe him not, O Tapa. I myself have seen his wagon. He hath no gun. Verily, he is the father of all lies."

"That voice sounds familiar," said the major to the sergeant. Then aloud, "Who is he that says I lie? Come out from the shadow of the warriors, O snake that hisses but dares not strike."

A man stepped out in response to the challenge.

"You shall learn that the snake has fangs, major," he said in English.

"A white man!" exclaimed Barton.

"No! It's Myburg."

"Yes, major, it's Myburg. You —— *schelm* of an Englisher, now you shall pay for the lashes you gave me. To the women you shall be given for torture. But first shall you be bound to your wagon wheel and I will thrash you till you howl for mercy."

"You're an amiable sort of chappie, aren't you? But it's not your turn to sing yet, old dear. What say ye, O Tapa? Wilt listen to the croaking of this vulture? Does a soldier of Magato listen to one who is neither white nor black?"

"Yet have ye not shown us, O white man, that his words are lies."

The major climbed up into the wagon and pushed the harmonium into full view.

"Then look ye here," he called, "and know that a white man does not lie."

"Why do ye mock us?"

"Nay, have patience."

He released several catches; the sides of the harmonium fell away disclosing a machine gun which glinted evilly as the last rays of the setting sun flecked its barrel.

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"Well, I'm ——," cried the sergeant.

"No wonder he told me not to bother about mending the harmonium." This from Barton.

"What now, O keeper of the store, what shall be thy punishment? Verily thou hast lied," said Tapa.

"Am I then a wizard," retorted Myburg, "that ye expect me to see through wood. Yet listen——"

He held a whispered conference with Tapa, while the three white men, their rifles held in readiness, watched their every move.

"Now heed ye, white men," Tapa began. His voice was now menacing. "Ye have entered the land of Magato. The punishment is death. Moreover, the man with the eye of glass hath treated this one, who was ever my friend, evilly. Glass Eye shall die by torture."

"But I bring the gun to Magato. The road is open to such a one."

"That you never shall," muttered the sergeant.

"Let's get out of this mess first," replied the major.

"That is all one to us," went on Tapa. "We will take the gun to Magato and thus win great honor and riches. The gun and all that thou hast shall be ours. The vultures shall pick thy bones."

"But these others—what of them?"

Tapa hesitated.

"They die too," shouted Myburg. "They also are spies. They came to seek out the strength of Magato's land. Kill them! Their horses, their guns shall be added to the plunder. So shall all be rich and leaders among the people. Kill them all!"

This Myburg said, knowing that if the police were allowed to escape he would never be able to return to his store.

DURING the parley the rest of the scouting party advanced slowly toward the wagon and grouped themselves around Tapa and Myburg.

"Kill the white men," they cried fiercely, and one of them leveled his gun threateningly.

Barton, seeing the gesture, fired, wounding the man in the thigh. A perfect hail of slug shots from the muzzle-loaders was the reply and the three white men bolted for the slight shelter afforded by the wagon, closely followed by Jim. From the wagon they opened a rapid fire—not aiming to kill but to discourage any attempts to rush them. In this they were successful, for the natives sought shelter among the rocks and contented themselves with returning the white men's fire. Their aim was poor, but, even so, the slugs pattered unpleasantly near.

"Well, you've done it now, Barton. What the —— made you plug the nigger. We had a chance before, but a —— slim one now."

"Oh, don't slang him, sergeant. There was no way out. Myburg would have seen to that. He's playin' for high stakes and hasn't the guts to be a sportsman."

"Well, what are we to do?"

"I haven't thought. Let's see. There's we three and Jim—though to be sure Jim isn't much of a hand with a gun. We've plenty of ammunition. What's to hinder us from inspanning and clearin' out. With the maxim and rifles it would be easy to keep them from closing in on us."

"That's good—let's hurry. Inspan, Jim!"

Jim shook his head.

"The dogs have stampeded the oxen, *Inkosi*."

"——!" The three white men spoke as one.

"That puts plan number one on the blink, but what's to hinder you chaps from getting away on your mounts? They're safe anyway."

"No you don't, major. How do we know this ain't a put-up job? No, we stick by you; besides—well, it wouldn't be playing the game."

"You're deucedly suspicious. However, I thank you for the rest."

"Look," said Barton. "They are closing in on us."

"Open up some of those concertinas, and we'll put a music roll in the harmonium."

Barton swiftly obeyed. Each concertina he opened contained a belt of cartridges for the machine gun.

"I take it you don't want to kill all these poor devils off, sergeant? No, I thought not. That might have been the third plan, but it's very messy; besides, Myburg is at the bottom of all this trouble. If it wasn't for him I would have gotten through to Magato, and you—you would have been firmly escorted out of the country."

He fired several rounds just in front of

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the oncoming natives, sending the dust flying up in their faces. It was enough. They retreated to the rocks once again.

"Ye see, men of Magato, I have in very truth the gun of many tongues. Art still of the same mind?"

"We can wait," called back Tapa. "Time is long, our patience great. But how long, think ye, can ye live without water? Consider, we are betwixt ye and the river."

Myburg echoed Tapa's mocking laugh.

Darkness covered the bush like a thick mantle. The stillness of the African night was upon them, intensified, it seemed, by the occasional shrill cry of the tiny tree hyrax, the mournful note of the bell bird, or the *rat-a-tat-tat* of the Maxim gun.

A twig snapped close by and was answered by a volley of shots from the wagon. A stifled groan told that not all the shots went astray in the darkness.

"Evidently they are not so patient after all," said the sergeant. "If they ever do rush us we're done for."

Again all was silent.

A spear of flame suddenly shot out of the darkness, followed by another, and another. All fell short of the wagon.

"Ah! I wondered how long it would be before they tried to set fire to the wagon. We must discourage that."

Again the Maxim spat fire. Yells and the noise of men running through the bush told of the accuracy of the aim.

Myburg's voice could be heard rallying the men.

"What, are ye all women? Is it thus that ye scorn great riches and honor? The white men are few, nor can they see to aim straight with their guns. What! Will ye wait till this matter comes to the ears of Magato? Desire ye to share the plunder with the *impis* of the king?"

"We must get away," said the major, "before Myburg induces them to attack us in force. Aren't you chappies assured that this is not a plant now? Won't you get away on your mounts?"

"Nothing doing, major. All or none."

"Thanks. Now keep up a steady fire while I make a few preparations."

In the center of the wagon he made a pile of its most inflammable contents, drenching it with the oil he carried for his lamp, and then constructed a slow-burning fuse.

"Jim, saddle the horses and lead them slowly to the clearing. We will cover your noise. You will wait there for us."

Joining the two policemen, the three fired with renewed speed, till it seemed the whole bush would awake to the tumult.

"Jim's had time to get to the clearing," said the major after a while.

"Let's go." He opened a trunk. "Wait a minute, I want to get a few papers. You'd better destroy the gun, Barton, in case the fire doesn't take hold."

Barton smashed the delicate breech mechanism of the gun with an ax.

"I'm ready now," said the major. "Have you a match, sergeant? Good! Light the fuse. It starts here."

A match glowed in the darkness of the wagon—went out—and in its place a tiny spark that ever moved appeared.

FAR out on the plain the major called a halt.

"It's time the fireworks began; let's watch. The horses can't go any further tonight with a double load. Let's camp. We're safe if we keep a good watch."

They unsaddled and watched in silence.

Suddenly a tongue of flame burst out of the brush.

"It worked, by Godfrey, it worked."

The flames gained headway. They could hear the reports of exploding cartridges and the yells of the balked natives.

"I hope the pig gets singed, *baas*," muttered Jim.

The flames died out and all was still.

Next morning, as Barton was saddling up, he burst into a roar of laughter.

"Well, what ails you now, Barton," said the sergeant peevishly.

"What will we do with the major?"

"I hate to say it, but he'll have to go along with us."

"But you can't arrest him. We've no evidence. You destroyed it yourself—you lighted the fuse."

"Yes, and you smashed the Maxim.''

The two men looked at the major, chagrin and admiration struggling for the mastery.

"Did you—" began the sergeant, then stopped.

The major met their glance coolly, held it for few moments; then his face relaxed. He lost the alert, erect carriage he had borne hitherto. His face became vacuous as he fumbled in his tunic pocket for his monocle.

"Bah Jove!" he said, screwing the glass in his eye. "I never thought of that."

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A Game of Get Even

A Complete Novelette

by NORMAN SPRINGER

Author of "Flat Behind the Ears."

PERHAPS if Mr. Starr had been aft at the moment it would not have occurred, for the mate prided himself upon being more canny and foreseeing than his temperamental master.

Still, Mr. Starr's temper was quite as peppery as Captain Sweet's. Quite likely he, too, would have forgotten that San Francisco, in the year of our Lord, 1880, was a port where a sailors' boarding master was a personage, to be handled with kid gloves by the skippers and officers of visiting vessels. Quite likely Mr. Starr would have joined with Captain Sweet in teaching "One-Eyed" Jack Cotton the respect due a clean deck. But the regrettable incident occurred when Mr. Starr was forward, which gave him the chance to appear virtuous and say, "I told you so," when retribution threatened.

Truly, the provocation was great. Imagine the situation. Here came the *Josiah P. Quigley*, in the opinion of her afterguard the smartest ship that flew the stars and stripes—the long suffering foreguard admitted her smartness but added she was the 'ottest blanked 'ooker afloat—booming in through the Golden Gate just ninety-five days from New York. There was no prouder man in the world, ashore or afloat, than the master-mariner who paced her poop-deck as she lolled gracefully up the bay to anchorage.

Ninety-five days from New York was the best passage of that year; indeed, of that decade! It was only eight more days than the famous, never-to-be-equalled passage of the *Flying Cloud*. He certainly knew how to drive a ship, the Old Man told himself. A warm, happy glow pervaded him. He already saw the beaming approval of the owners' agent and felt and heard the hearty handshakes and loud exclamations of admiration with which his brother master-mariners would greet him at the rendezvous in the Clipper Bar.

Oh, he knew how to make the old girl show her legs—he and his mate. Certainly Starr deserved some of the credit for the passage. But, after all, the captain was the important man. They might put his

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picture in the papers. At least they would publish the old girl's.

Captain Sweet paused at the break of the poop and permitted his eyes to rove lovingly over his speckless command. The *Josiah P. Quigley*, making port, was a brilliant illustration of what a ship should be. She had tidied shipshape and Bristol fashion. The efficient Mr. Starr attended to that.

Not a stray rope yarn nor the tiniest rag of canvas fluttered in the breeze. Not a stay sagged limply. The rigging glistened with freshly applied tar; the paint-work gleamed spotless. The decks were white as coral sand. The poop-deck—Captain Sweet's eyes fairly gloated upon the smooth, shiny surface of the poop-deck. He told himself that no ship had ever entered the port of San Francisco with so beautiful a poop-deck. He felt so proud that moment he would not have exchanged places with the president, himself, in the White House.

Poop-decks were more than a hobby with Amos Sweet. They were his passion. He was a connoisseur of poop-decks; he possessed a world-wide reputation as the captain of the finest appearing poop-deck afloat and every voyage he saw to it that the hands labored diligently to sustain his reputation.

They had labored most diligently this passage just ending. It had been a fair weather passage and Captain Sweet had seen to it that each shining moment added to the shine of the poop-deck. He took his departure, leaving New York with the determination to excel himself in this matter of poop-decks; off Hatteras the boatswain had the holystones up from the rope locker; off Cape Stiff the watch passed the time between sleet squalls in polishing the poop-deck; in the latitude of Callao there was no afternoon watch below, because the poop-deck needed attention.

Not until the California landfall was imminent, and all the holystones worn thin, and all the knees and tempers forward worn out entirely, did the labor cease. And then Captain Sweet hovered anxiously over the carpenter while the latter applied to the deck the triple layers of oil, which gave to the wood the rich luster of a freshly polished piano.

"Did you ever see a prettier job, mister?" demanded the captain when all was finished.

Mr. Starr pursed his lips and squinted professionally fore and aft and athwartships.

"Pretty fair, I will say," he gave judgment.

"Pretty fair!" echoed the captain in an indignant voice. "Mister, this poop-deck is the finest looking bit of deck you ever saw. And, blow me, I want it to remain so. Have the hands show their boots to the carpenter, sir, and have him draw the nails. Lord help the man who scratches this poop-deck, sir!"

So came the *Josiah P. Quigley* into port, with a proud man aft, pacing up and down in carpet slippers, with a proud mate forward, having a deck-broom lashed to the fore-truck, with a disillusioned forecastle howling dolorously and emphatically at the capstan:

"It's time to leave her, Johnny!"

It was a day of days in Captain Sweet's life, and each fresh contact with the port he was approaching gave him a fresh accession of pride.

The pilot he picked up off the Farallones said he had made a passage that would live, sir, would live—and the ship, sir, aye, she was a beauty; one could see with half an eye a sailor commanded here—and the poop-deck! By heaven, sir, never in his born days had he seen such a poop-deck!

Captain Sweet invited the pilot below to sample something.

The whitehall boat which met the clipper far out beyond the Heads and hooked her at imminent risk of swamping, was manned by the two Tommy Roundheads, father and son. Old Tommy Roundhead, who clambered aboard, was a diplomat as well as a champion boatman; he wanted the ship's business and he knew Captain Sweet of old. He paused in his ascent of the poop-ladder and gazed fixedly at the gleaming deck; then he sat down and with deliberate ostentation removed his sea-boots. He finally approached the Old Man stepping high in his stockinged feet.

"I'm dashed if I ever seen such a poop-deck, captain," he greeted the proud commander.

Old Tommy Roundhead was promised the ship's business.

Captain Sweet had never thought much of doctors as doctors. He averred they were an insinuating nuisance, always calling

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a plain rash some dangerous sounding name or making a chap with pimples believe he had something the matter with his liver. He, Captain Sweet, knew what to do when a hand laid up just as well as any man who talked Latin for bellyache. If the hand were malingering, a hint in Mr. Starr's ear produced an effective if spectacular cure; if the fellow were really bowled over, the black draught in the medicine chest and the dried apples in the lazaret soon set him on his feet again.

If a man occasionally turned up his toes and gave up his ghost despite this treatment—why, there was no accounting for the stubborn vagaries of ungrateful sailormen, anyway. A blinking, sour-faced sawbones couldn't do any better. The law gave doctors certain rights over vessels, but laws were made by shoregoing lubbers who didn't know anything about anything to speak of. If you doubted this, Captain Sweet would tell you to read the "Congressional Record" and be convinced.

If shipmasters made the laws, things would be done shipshape and proper and the country would be a lot better off, declared Captain Sweet. There would be an end of this pratique nonsense, at any rate, sir, and a clipper ship would no longer bow to the sweet will of some asterisked dude of an interne who hadn't even decently killed his man yet, by George, sir!

But the medical profession advanced several degrees in Captain Sweet's eyes when the doctor came on board. Captain Sweet had never before met such an intelligent doctor. The fellow had an eye on him, an eye for order and cleanliness.

"Clean, captain, clean!" the doctor said. "No need to bother you very much; a ship as clean and neat as this one is bound to be healthy! And this deck! Captain, I've been boarding ships for ten years and I've never seen a deck like this! I just wish my old woman could see it! It would do her good, sir!"

Captain Sweet gave the doctor the cigar the pilot had given him and remarked affably that as soon as the pig-tailed, slant-eyed son-of-a-Canton-sea-cook who inhabited his galley recovered from his inevitable making-port spree of poppy and *samshu*, he would be just proud to have the doctor and lady off to dinner some evening, and while they were on the subject of poop-decks, did the doctor know——

II

THE ship was nearly in position to let go anchor. On the forecastle head, Mr. Starr stood on the starboard bitts and told the crew for the last time this voyage just what he thought of them. He didn't think much of them. The boatswain lounged by the cathead, ready to give the stout kick which would spill the hook and really end the voyage.

On the sacred poop-deck Captain Sweet leaned again the fife-rail and gazed dreamily at the slowly nearing water-front, at the ugly, happy-go-lucky, build-as-you-please water-front of old San Francisco, the most adventurous and romantic water-front in the western hemisphere. But Captain Sweet did not see it in this latter light; indeed, he hardly saw it in any light at that moment, for his wits were wool-gathering. He looked with vacant gaze upon the planked streets, and the rambling blocks of buildings built upon piles, over the water. He had no thought for the busy life of the water-front. He had, in particular, no thought for the crimpdom which had its sinister, powerful being on this water-front.

Captain Sweet was day-dreaming. Before his eyes was a picture of the interior of the Clipper Bar, as he remembered it from his last visit to the port—a cool, low-ceiled room, with a clean, shining bar and sanded floor, and chairs and tables in the corner. He was seated in the corner now, in an armchair, surrounded by an admiring circle.

He had already noted the shipping in port, so he peopled this circle with real, flesh and blood persons. He knew whom he would meet in the Clipper Bar. There was "Shotgun" Crogan, of the *Prudence Snow*, and Solwell, of the *Red Jacket*, Jenkin, of the *W. A. Holcomb*, and "Bucko" Holmes, and Jim Waddington, and "Old Lady" Green, who did the cabin washing on Wednesdays, and "Holy Joe" MacComber, who got drunk every Sunday, and preached hell-fire and damnation to his thirsty, envious crew—all masters of smart ships, all prime seamen, all crowding about his chair in the Clipper Bar, exclaiming, admiring.

"Ninety-five—what do you think of that!"

"Best passage in ten years, captain!"

"Not many do it under a hundred these days, but I remember——"

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"A lucky slant give you your westing, captain?"

Oh, he saw them, just as they would appear before him in a couple of hours. He knew every inflection of their voices. He saw the green envy in their eyes. Solwell wouldn't be so cocky now; his best was ninety-eight and he came into port looking like a tramp, with a foretopmast sprung. Yes, he heard them talking, and he heard his own voice answering.

"No, it wasn't luck, particularly, gentlemen! Just an ordinary passage, and we had the usual weather Down Under. But you know my ship, gentlemen. She's smart! And, if I do say it myself, I know how to handle her; and my mate, you know, is Gideon Starr, and I'll admit he's not bad, no, sir, not bad at all. We kept the hands up to scratch and drove her, gentlemen, drove her. Drove her and kept the work up, too. And speaking of that, I want you gentlemen to come off and take a squint at my poop-deck before the blanked stevedores muss it up! My poop-deck, gentlemen——"

It was at this precise instant One-Eyed Jack Cotton walked upon the stage, swam into Captain Sweet's vision and rudely interrupted the mariner's entrancing train of thought—which is the literary way of saying that Mr. Cotton's whitehall hooked the main chains and the master crimp himself, clambered over the rail to pay his respects to the Old Man.

Mr. Cotton did not know Captain Sweet, for the master of the *Josiah P. Quigley* had patronized "Shangai" Brown when he wished to buy seamen upon the occasions of previous visits to the port. He really didn't care much about making Captain Sweet's acquaintance. But, happening to be afloat upon the bay, and being interested in ships—or in the flesh and blood that sailed them—Mr. Cotton yielded to an impulse to board the famous clipper and look her over. If he had known Captain Sweet, it is not likely Mr. Cotton would have behaved differently. For why should one of the "Big Three" amongst the boarding masters consider the feelings and hobbies of a mere shipmaster?

Captain Sweet had never seen One-Eyed Jack before. He never wished to see him again. But if he had known the fellow by sight as well as he already knew him by reputation, he must inevitably have acted as he did act. As he was fond of saying afterward, "There was such a thing as pushing a man too far, sir!"

Captain Sweet suddenly beheld Mr. Cotton standing before him. The same instant indifference and lassitude forsook the captain's attitude and he became an alert and flashing-eyed mariner. He glared at Mr. Cotton—not at his face, though that grim, battle-scarred item of Mr. Cotton's appearance usually arrested a stranger's eyes, but at Mr. Cotton's boots.

They were generously built, those boots, for a good deal of Mr. Cotton was on the ground. They were brogans, of stout and comfortable build, with hobnails in the heels to give Mr. Cotton a better foot-hold upon the slippery cobblestones of the Barbary Coast. They also gave him a better foothold upon other, smoother surfaces, such as poop-decks.

Captain Sweet pointed an accusing finger and cried in a voice that was an hysterical squeak—

"Look at them marks, sir!"

Mr. Cotton looked and saw two unsightly tracks upon the beautiful deck, leading from the ladder to his own heels. The sight of them struck Mr. Cotton as being funny. He chuckled—and then gulped, while his one eye blinked rapidly. His mouth happened to be full of Nigger Twist. He relieved himself deliberately, taking careful aim and squirting forth a stream of tobacco-juice so broad and thick it quite obliterated the offending heel-marks for half their length.

"Look like chicken marks, don't they, captain?" he chuckled in the half-stunned skipper's face.

Then it was that Captain Sweet acted so rashly. He smote One Eyed Jack Cotton upon the skull with an oaken belaying-pin snatched from the fife-rail. He bruised his toes and lost his carpet slippers dancing upon Mr. Cotton's midriff. He took the crimp by the hair of his head and mopped up the horrid stains with the miscreant's face. Finally, with a skill born of long years' practise in handling obstreperous seamen, Captain Sweet lifted the limp Mr. Cotton by the scruff of his neck and the slack of his breeches and cast him afar—so far, indeed, that the crimp cleared the ladder and the ship's rail and descended sprawling upon the heads of his astounded runners in the whitehall alongside.

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Thereafter Captain Sweet stood upon the rail and used language, so long as Mr. Cotton's whitehall was within earshot.

III

WEEKS later the *Josiah P. Quigley* was ready for sea again. She lay in the stream, her bowsprit pointing toward blue water, lack of men holding her leashed. Master and mates, cook and tradesmen she had. But the forecastle bunks gaped empty.

In the cabin Captain Sweet was passing a painful evening in conference with Mr. Starr. They sat at the cabin table and sipped toddies and swore at the ways of the world. That is, Captain Sweet swore. The mate wrinkled his brow and thought. Captain Sweet was long past thinking. He could only use language to voice his opinion of the situation. He finally left his chair and stamped up and down the cabin and declared emphatically he would be blowed if he did.

Mr. Starr leaned back in his chair, lightly caressed his beard and remarked mildly that Captain Sweet would be blowed if he didn't.

"But it's an outrage, mister!" exclaimed the captain. "I go begging a crew of that scoundrel after wiping my deck with him six weeks ago!"

"How else will we get a crew?" inquired Mr. Starr.

"Think of the blood-money!" groaned the captain. "He boasts he'll make me pay a hundred a man. What will the owners say to that?"

"What will they say to our loafing in port, eating up the freights in dues?" demanded the mate. "No sir, there is no other way. These San Francisco crimps stick together. What did they tell you today at Hansen's Bar?"

"I went to Shanghai Brown, of course, and the scut laughed in my face," answered Captain Sweet. "He said he had no men for me, and that no boarding master in the port had any men for me, except One-Eyed Cotton."

"Then we'll have to get our crew from Cotton," said Mr. Starr.

A green halo appeared over Captain Sweet's head as he voiced once again his opinion of Mr. Cotton.

"The double blanked, swivel-eyed swab!" he concluded. "Haven't I said I went to see him? And he refused to see me! Me! Sent out word he'd get a crew together for me in two weeks time!"

"Well, there's no way of getting a ship out of 'Frisco without consent of the crimps," stated Mr. Starr. "You know that, sir. They could hold us here without men for months if they wished. No shipping a crowd in this port, except through a boarding-house. Especially us, being known as a smart ship, so to speak, and not being particularly popular with sailormen."

"And who gives my ship a hard name?" demanded the skipper unreasonably.

"Not the mates, sir," retorted Mr. Starr, promptly. "Of course we make 'em toe the mark and step lively, and there wouldn't be any ninety-five-day passages if a hand were not dressed down occasionally. But it's not our hazing gives us a bad reputation, sir. It is, if you'll pardon me saying it, your —— poop-deck, sir!"

"Mr. Starr!" cried the captain.

"Yes, it is," insisted the mate. "It's scandalous, the yarns that have been spread around this beach by the last crowd we had. I heard some of them no later than last night; repeated to me, sir, while I was sitting in the Mates' Retreat, on Sansome Street. They were not about me, sir; they were all about the poop-deck. And it was a bit tough, you'll admit, sir, sand-and-canvasing off the Horn! They're calling you 'Poop-deck' Sweet, on the beach, sir!"

"And what are they calling you, mister? Answer me that!" exclaimed the captain. "Poop-deck Sweet, is it? And what are you in every port we've ever touched? 'Ginger' Starr, sir! Ginger, that's what they call you! I've heard it with my own ears, sir, in this very port, sir! Ginger Starr! You should hear some of the yarns I've listened to, Mr. Starr, sitting in the Clipper Bar. Yarns that were spread around this beach by the last crowd we had! They're not yarns about Amos Sweet or his poop-deck; they're yarns about my mates, sir, especially about my first mate! Yarns as how Ginger Starr makes the ship so hot a hand blisters his feet walking about the decks! That's how my ship gets her reputation, sir!"

"Well, well, we must not quarrel about a little thing like that!" the mate interrupted. "The important thing, captain, is that we

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have the reputation of a hot ship, and there's no way we can get a crew, that I know of, save through a crimp. For that matter, if we were known to coddle our fo'c'stle like Old Lady Green coddles his, we could not get out of this port without the help of a boarding-house. The crimps own this port, captain!"

"I know they do," said the captain sadly.

He dropped into his chair and stared moodily at his glass.

"Then if Jack Cotton is the only crimp who will give us men," continued Mr. Starr, "we'll have to patronize Jack Cotton."

The captain used more language.

"To think," he concluded, "of the master of the smartest ship afloat having to crawl before a pop-eyed swab of a crimp! Don't it make you feel bad, mister? She's your ship, too!"

"Of course it does," said Mr. Starr.

"Then why don't you think of some plan?" demanded Captain Sweet. "I've been hearing for five years what a foxy duck you are, but now you just sit there and let me do the talking!"

"I've been thinking, while you've been swearing at him," replied Mr. Starr pointedly.

"Thinking is what a mate is supposed to do," retorted the skipper. "Before I got my ship, mister, there wasn't a mate on the Western Ocean with more tricks up his sleeve than Amos Sweet."

"What a pity!" mused the mate.

"Mister!" exclaimed the captain warningly.

"No offense, sir," said Mr. Starr, hurriedly. "I only meant, what a pity this wasn't the Western Ocean. We could gather up a mob of stiffs on the beach in New York or Liverpool and tell the crimps go hang. But we can't do it in San Francisco. If we get out of this port with a crowd and with out heads in the air, we've got to match wits with Jack Cotton and beat him, sir!"

"How can one match wits against a cold deck?" demanded Captain Sweet, gloomily.

"By rigging a cold deck of our own," replied the mate. "Of course, I knew you couldn't think up a scheme—I mean, captain, that, being so upset about this matter, you naturally couldn't be expected to think coolly about it, and I, as your first officer, am duty bound, as you yourself said, to lend a hand. I've been working my mind on it ever since you came on board, and I think I got a plan that will best that body-snatching shark. We'll surprize him, captain!"

"The surprizing Mr. Starr!" remarked the captain with a hint of sarcasm in his voice.

"Exactly," said the mate. "And you'll have to admit, sir, that my surprizes have got you and this vessel out of more than one mess. How about last year, in Savannah, when that little black-haired baggage followed us from Santiago, and your wife due next morning from Boston——"

"Now, mister, you needn't drag out that unfortunate little mistake!" interjected Captain Sweet pleadingly. "We agreed to forget all about it. I'm not saying anything against your surprizes, mister. Don't I always thank you for them and give you due credit? You can't blame me for having the feeling they'll land both of us in jail sometime!"

"If you feel that way about it, sir, we'd better take the lee deck of Jack Cotton and eat whatever humble pie he hands us," stated Mr. Starr.

"No we don't!" cried the captain. "If you've got a surprize for that ribald, fish-mouthed billy-goat, by George, we'll spring it, so long as it stops short of knocking him on the head! If it weren't for the old woman at home, I'd even agree to that—it would be a fit punishment for all the poor seamen he's knocked on the head in his time!"

"And sold to the likes of us," admonished Mr. Starr. "Well, my surprize isn't anything so fancy as a funeral, but such as it is it may give us the chance to dress the blighter down properly before the finish. Just let me think a moment and get it all straight in my head, and I'll tell you something about it."

MR. STARR leaned his cheek upon his hand and cogitated deeply. In such a posture he looked surprizingly like a Methodist deacon saying grace. But then, as Captain Sweet said, Mr. Starr was a surprizing man any way you took him, in appearance as well as deed.

"He said he was going to hold us two weeks yet?" Mr. Starr finally inquired.

"Yes, sir, that's just what the dog-eared villain said," responded the captain

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resentfully. "He sent that word to me, mister. The swab wouldn't see me himself; he was in the back room behind his bar and he sent his dish-faced, squarehead runner to tell me so."

"Then we have plenty of time to get ready," said the mate. "I think three days will be long enough."

"Get ready for what?" demanded Captain Sweet.

"To receive our crew and get to sea," replied the surprizing Mr. Starr. "You've got your clearance all ready, so there won't be any delay there."

"What are you driving at?" asked the skipper. "Look here, mister, you said you were going to tell me what your surprize was!"

"No, sir; for if I do it won't be any surprize," said the mate. "You'd go ashore and spread it all over the Clipper Bar and Jack Cotton would hear about it, and then what?"

"Mr. Starr, I never thought you had such a low opinion of your captain," said Sweet with dignity.

"Oh, no offense, sir," the mate hastened to add. "But you know as well as I that when you've taken a glass you're apt to talk a bit, about the poop-deck, and so on—and so you might drop a word you never meant to drop if I told you my plan. You'll have to take my scheme on trust, sir. You know me. I've pulled you out of more than one hole since I've been in this ship, and I'll pull you out of this one, or I'm not Gideon Starr. You just leave all the details to me, sir!"

"How do you think that looks, mister?" demanded the captain in an aggrieved voice. "Me, the master of this ship, not knowing what my mate is up to."

"You know what I'm up to," answered Mr. Starr. "I'm going to persuade that blanked crimp to give us a crew within the next few days. I'm going to get that crowd out of him without paying any fancy price. We're going to pay the fellow with the main sheet, captain, and by the Lord Harry, Jack Cotton, and not the *Josiah P. Quigley*, is going to be the laughing-stock of this port. That's what I'm up to, sir."

"I'd like to be there when you are persuading One-Eyed Cotton to do all this," remarked the captain skeptically. "What are you going to persuade him with—a .45?"

"He's going to persuade himself," answered the mate. "That's the difference between your brains and mine, captain—I can think of a way to make the man hang himself. No offense meant, sir—but I don't intend to try any knock-down-and-drag-out methods on him, not ashore, anyway. I'll work on his character, sir."

"The less said about that swab's character the better, sir," said the captain. "Why, you talk, mister, as if he were a church brother of yours."

"Never clapped eyes upon him," asserted Mr. Starr. "Except upon the stern of him, as you pitched him over the rail that day. But we know this much about his character—who ever heard of a 'Frisco crimp who would turn down a chance to make a crooked dollar?

"That's the line I'll follow. He's greedy, and he hates you. If he sees a chance to satisfy his hate and make some money out of you at the same time, he'll take it, won't he? In fact, that's just what he's doing now, making us wait two weeks for a crew and boosting the blood-money per man out of sight. Well, I'll see that he sees an additional and even better chance to get even. Don't you think he'll jump at it? You bet, or I don't know the breed!

"All you have to do, captain, is make ready to receive the crowd on board. Warn Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Thompson and tell the carpenter—no, never mind that, I'll let Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Thompson know what to expect myself and I'll see Chips before I go ashore and explain what I want of him."

"When are you going ashore?" asked the captain.

"Right away—tonight," answered the mate. "Just as soon, sir, as we've had our fight and I've blacked your eye."

"Our fight!" cried the startled skipper. "Just as soon as you have blacked my eye! Here, what's this you're driving at, mister?"

"It's the only way, captain," declared Mr. Starr firmly. "I've thought of all the other ways but they won't do. I even thought of shaving my beard and passing myself off on him as a stranger. But too many people know me in this port. So there is nothing left for us but to fight. Then I jump the ship and we hate each other all over the water-front."

"Jump the ship!" exclaimed the captain, aghast.

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"Not really," patiently explained the mate. "We're just rigging this affair for Cotton's benefit. We'll pretend we've had a big row, a fist fight, and I'll move my chest ashore and go, about saying you're the worst old scoundrel I ever had dealings with, and I'm through with you forever and just aching for a chance to pay you off for the way you've treated me!"

"Treated you? I've always treated you fair and aboveboard!" declared the captain indignantly.

"Of course, but we want that crimp to think otherwise. You'll go up to the Clipper Bar, sir, and say you are glad to be rid of me and show your black eye."

"I haven't any black eye," interjected the captain.

"You will have in a minute," promised Mr. Starr. "No offense meant, captain, but I'll have to do it. Jack Cotton is no fool, you know, and if we go about saying we've had a fight, and neither of us showing the marks of a fight, he's likely to suspect our little game. We want to say that we quarreled about the bonus you offered me if we made the passage out under a hundred days—that's a good yarn, sir; you should have offered me a bonus—and we'll say I blacked your eye and quit. Cotton will swallow that yarn."

"What's the matter with saying I blacked your eye and you quit?" asked the dazed captain. "I don't like it your way. It doesn't seem proper, mister, for a captain to let his mate punch him in the eye!"

"That wouldn't do at all," said Mr. Starr quickly and decisively. "Just think how it would look! Ginger Starr gets a black eye, and the man who gives it to him is walking around boasting of it. That looks fishy, captain. They know me too well on this beach. If I dressed you down and sent you to hospital, they might believe it—not otherwise. Well, we're going to sea in a few days, so I can't send you to the hospital."

"No, you can't!" exclaimed Captain Sweet emphatically.

"Then just sit still. So—it will take but a second," said the mate in a soothing voice.

And before Captain Sweet's mind could overtake the nimbler wits of the mate, Mr. Starr leaned over the table, clenched a fist that was famous on five oceans and knocked the skipper out of his chair.

IV

THERE was a stir in maritime circles in San Francisco port. Eyebrows lifted, tongues wagged and heads shook. Also, elbows crooked frequently and throats gulped busily and the steam-beer brewery dispatched an extra wagon-load to the water-front. It was quite a stir.

Old Tommy Roundhead started the stir. He trotted into Jimmy the Drummer's, and, over a schooner of the popular beverage, recounted with great gusto his early morning adventure. His whitehall had been called by the *Josiah P. Quigley* shortly after dawn, said Old Tommy Roundhead.

When he and Young Tommy, in response to the call, rowed out to the ship, they discovered a sea-chest sitting upon the gangway and Mr. Ginger Starr sitting upon the chest. Mr. Starr was expressing himself; he was consigning the vessel and her master—especially her master—to the uttermost depths; he was calling upon Heaven to utterly blast the ship. The decks were deserted but certain muffled noises coming from the cabin indicated that some one else was also expressing himself.

Mr. Starr, said Old Tommy Roundhead, let it be known to all who had ears within a mile radius that this was a happy day in his, Starr's, life, for he was leaving for good and all the hottest workhouse and the most miserly and faithless skipper on the waters of the world. So help him Heaven, he was. And would the lads in the whitehall lend him a hand with the chest, for he was going ashore bag and baggage.

All the way to the boat wharf Mr. Starr continued to express himself—particularly upon the subject of miserly and faithless captains.

"He swore just beautiful!" said Old Tommy Roundhead.

The boatman's news was received with excited interest and punctuated by amazed oaths quite as beautiful as any Mr. Starr could have used. "Jimmy the Drummer" so far forgot himself as to set up the drinks on the house. Then eager tongues set out to spread the word.

For wars and rumors of wars, and the fate of nations, had less power to startle the water-front than this news of Tommy Roundhead's. Starr, the famous bucko, on the beach. Ginger Starr, the permanent

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first mate of the pride of the merchant service, the man who, the knowing ones knew, really ran the ship and made the renowned passages. Mr. Starr fighting with Poop-deck Sweet and quitting his job. This was news to make East Street exclaim.

Which it did. The gossipers who retailed the boatman's yarn found willing audiences. Before their news became stale, Joe O'Neil, the hackman who had driven Mr. Starr from the wharf to the Mates' Retreat, burst into Mother Dowd's with a story that more than confirmed all Old Tommy Roundhead had said.

"He's on the beach, and on the bust!" affirmed Mr. O'Neil. "He stopped four times to liquor on the way to Sansome Street. And the words he used. Said he was going to cut Sweet's heart out of him. Said he was going to square things with Sweet. Said Sweet was—well, he talked strong about Sweet; I never heard a man talk stronger in my life. Something wonderful! There's been a row on the *Quigley* all right, and Ginger Starr is on the beach, and on the bust!"

That Mr. Starr was "on the beach" became an established fact when, with midmorning, came Captain Sweet on shore. The captain sailed into the Clipper Bar as majestically as his gait and girth and his bruised and discolored eye permitted. That brilliant optic caused a sensation. Even conservative old Commodore Allen took his cigar out of his mouth at sight of it and remarked audibly that it must be true Captain Sweet had made an ass of himself. Captain Sweet pretended not to hear. It was evident he was ashamed of his eye. He was very dignified. It was plain he was trying to conceal his keen humiliation behind a stern, judicial pose.

"What's a black eye?" he demanded of his brother skippers. "I've given plenty of black eyes in my time, and I'm free to admit this isn't the first one I've worn, myself. No, gentlemen, it's the black ingratitude of the man that makes me all hollow inside.

"For over five years I've been the kind friend and captain of Gideon Starr. I've paid his fines and kept him out of jail in nigh every port between here and Liverpool. I've stood by, just because of friendship, gentlemen, while he gave my ship a hard reputation with his rowdy ways of handling sailormen. I've settled out of court a half dozen felonious-assault-upon-the-high-seas scrapes his temper got the ship into.

"I've done all this and more for him, and what is my reward? I ask you, what is my reward? A black eye! We have a little argument about money matters, sitting sociably at table over a couple of toddies, and he springs to his feet without a word of warning, gentlemen, and biffs me in the eye. That's gratitude, that is; that's the way Gideon Starr repays my kindness, my fatherly kindness, of five years!"

For five minutes Captain Sweet described the virtues Mr. Starr lacked, paying particular attention to the virtue of gratitude.

"I'm through with him," he concluded. "I'm on my way now to the commissioner's. I'll pay him off, and wash my hands of him for good. I only hope his next voyage doesn't get some poor shipmaster into trouble."

"Never mind, captain—you're well shut of the fellow," said Shotgun Crogan, of the *Prudence Snow*, giving Captain Sweet a sympathetic handshake. "I'll let you know if I run across a smart man looking for a ship. Must be off—appointment with agent."

Whereupon Captain Crogan made all possible haste in the direction of the Mates' Retreat, in Sansome Street.

HOLMES, of the *Quickstep*, and Jenkin, of the *Holcomb*, each gave Captain Sweet a sympathetic handshake and sympathetic advice and left hurriedly to keep appointments—and hastened after Captain Crogan. With the services of the best "chief kicker" in the merchant service to be had, perhaps, for the asking, it was no time for a wideawake skipper of a smart ship to be standing upon ceremony.

Mr. Starr stood at his favorite bar and told Crogan and Holmes and Jenkin and a large half circle of other interested persons—including, as Mr. Starr had taken particular pains to discover, a broad-faced, flat-nosed Finnish gentleman who was known as a retainer of John Cotton—just where he, Gideon Starr, stood in this matter.

He stood, said Mr. Starr, upon his two legs and for his rights, by Heaven, yes! That's where he stood and he didn't care if the whole world knew it. Had he blacked Poop-deck Sweet's eye? Yes, he had. He

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was sorry he hadn't wrung the miserly old skinflint's neck.

He was a patient man, averred Mr. Starr, but there was an end of even patience. He had borne with Captain Sweet's faults. Mr. Starr named these faults at picturesque length; Captain Sweet, it appeared, had no virtues. The captain's great fault, the fault which first stunned Mr. Starr and then caused him to revolt, was ingratitude. It was the black ingratitude of the man that made him boil inside.

"For five years and more I stood that old devil's whims," explained Mr. Starr. "For five years I stood by and watched him haze into mutiny every crowd we shipped, with his eternal scrubbing of his poop-deck —and then I'd have to turn to and dress them down so he could get some more scrubbing out of them! That's the way I got myself a hard name, gentlemen. I'm naturally a peaceable and retiring sort.

"And what sort of reward do I get for all this? The low-down old miser tries to cheat me—that's the reward I get, gentlemen! Mind you, it isn't the money; it's the principle of the thing, it's the ingratitude of the black-hearted, black-whiskered old jelly-fish that hurts! Who made that ninety-five day passage? Was it Poop-deck Sweet? No, it was Gideon Starr, of Provincetown, Massachusetts, that's who it was. I drove her while he was messing with his cursed holystones.

"And when the owners hung up a bonus for the passage, so much a day for every day under a hundred and ten, did they expect him to pocket it all? How about me, Gideon Starr, first officer, gentlemen? Did Sweet come to me and say, 'Here, mister, is your whack, with my thanks, and the owners'.' Did he? He did not.

"The money-grubbing old skate buried the whole amount in his pocket, and when I hinted, just courteously hinted, gentlemen, that perhaps the watches below I sacrificed off the Horn, and the skin I lost off my knuckles in 20 North, when the crowd refused duty and said they'd be eternally —— if they'd touch hand to the poop-deck again—and when I hinted, just hinted, gentlemen, that all this perhaps entitled me to a whack of the bonus, the club-nosed, bandy-legged old pirate said he was the captain of the ship, and he paid his mates their wages, and when they were worth any more he'd let them know. Said that to me, Gideon Starr. Hinted I wasn't worth my pay. By Heaven, gentlemen, it's a wonder I didn't tie him into a square knot, instead of just blacking his eye!"

Mr. Starr refilled his glass, crooked a significant finger which inspired the bartender to activity, and drew from the room approving murmurs. Mr. Starr was setting them up. Having set them up, he rested and listened moodily to the expressions of sympathy.

The room was unanimous in its opinion of Captain Sweet. The opinion was the same as Mr. Starr's opinion. Each man said all the hard things he could think of about Amos Sweet, and some of them thought of some very hard things. Even Captains Holmes, Jenkin and Crogan, and Captain Martin of the *Gloria*, who had also dropped into the Mates' Retreat by accident, as it were, said hard things about their friend of the *Josiah P. Quigley*. They enumerated his shortcomings as only brother shipmasters—or a wife—could enumerate them. Then each, as he found opportunity, whispered into Mr. Starr's ear that there was a first mate's berth open, if Mr. Starr cared to consider it.

Mr. Starr said bluntly that he was in no condition to consider anything of the sort at present. His feelings had been deeply hurt. He had to recover from the heartache caused by five years misplaced confidence. Tomorrow, next week, he might think of another ship. Not today. He had a score to settle before he signed on again.

He took particular pains to speak directly toward the open ear of the flat-faced Finnish gentleman.

"A black eye can't square things between me and Poop-deck Sweet. No, sir. I've got five long years of naggings and insults to get even for before I ship again. And I'm going to get even for them. Any of you gents that has a mind to can tell him I said so. He knows me, Gideon Starr, and you can tell him that Gideon Starr has a surprize up his sleeve for Poop-deck Sweet!"

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A GOOD many men carried Mr. Starr's threat to the Clipper Bar, and to other bars and chandleries and boat sheds and wharfs upon the busy waterside. Tongues clacked from Port Point to the China Dock.

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No tongue clacked faster or more to the point than the tongue of the Finnish gentleman. He made a detailed report of everything he had seen and heard upon the boat wharf, in the Clipper Bar and in the Mates' Retreat. But his tongue did not wag for the benefit of all and sundry, as did other tongues; he told his tale in an undertone into the cocked ear of One-Eyed Cotton.

Mr. Cotton listened to his runner's tale with a grin of appreciation twisting, if not actually lighting, his countenance. It was music to his ears. The Finn, instinctively practising the sycophant's art, laid stress upon those points in his narrative he knew would best please his master; he dilated upon Captain Sweet's crestfallen air, he described the black eye at length and with imagination, he became profanely eloquent over Mr. Starr's vindictive rage, he hinted darkly that the mate's threats presaged some awful vengeance upon the captain's person.

"A bad mans to monkay vit—Yinger Starr!" he concluded.

One-Eyed Jack felt so good over the story he went behind the bar and poured himself a generous tipple of rock and rye, and the Finn, making the best of the golden moment, sidled to the steam-beer cabinet and drew himself two foaming schooners in quick succession and without reproof.

"I think that between me and Ginger Starr, that—various-named-and-so-and-so—on the *Quigley* is going to remember his stay in port!" opinioned Mr. Cotton.

"Ay tank so, *ja*," agreed the Finnish gentleman, placing his hand upon the beer spigot for the third time with seeming carelessness.

An ominous rumble in the crimp's throat checked him. Mr. Cotton was never so elated or depressed by news good or bad that he failed to keep his single eye sharply upon the main chance. There was no profit in permitting a runner to guzzle on the house out of hours.

The man from Finland slouched dispiritedly across the room and joined the frowsy, drowsy crowd of hangers-on who sprawled in arm-chairs against the farther wall or wrangled half-heartedly over a pedro game at an adjacent table. These were Mr. Cotton's retainers, the tools of his trade, known to forecastle fame as "Cotton's Rats." They were, without exception, hard-case sailormen who preferred the wet ways of the Barbary Coast to the wet ways of the high seas; a round dozen in number, of proven rascality and skill in gang fighting, Mr. Cotton used them to crimp crews, stuff ballot-boxes and pay off grudges at so much per grudge.

Jack Cotton was a man who was making his mark upon his time. With a bung-starter, chiefly, 'tis true, yet it was a goodly dent. He was one of the "Big Three," the trio of crimps who controlled the political destinies of the water-front wards, and the name of One-Eyed Cotton was mentioned respectfully, if not with respect, east of Montgomery Street. It even had weight in the police court and the city hall and far away Sacramento. Mr. Cotton might control his votes with a blackjack—but he controlled them.

One-Eyed Cotton was the strong arm of the triumvirate. Shanghai Brown was the brains, and he was a man who had discovered how to prevent his right hand knowing what his left hand was doing. "Gentleman" Tom Boyle was the silver and seductive tongue. He boasted he needed neither force nor drugs as an aid to business. The blarney did it. But One-Eyed Jack was the strong arm, and his Rats the strong arm squad, of sailortown.

Mr. Cotton scorned finesse. He was shrewd, shrewd enough to put two and two together and, when necessary, call the total five—otherwise he would never have survived in his exciting profession—but he preferred straight out stand-up-and-knock-down methods of conducting business.

He enjoyed the prestige such methods gave him. To sally forth at the head of his Rats and swagger and batter his way through the kens of the district was his idea of a good time. To pluck a strolling seaman off the sidewalk and set him down upon the deck of an outward-bound ship was his idea of a good joke. To keep faith with no man, but to double-cross whenever it seemed profitable, was his idea of legitimate business methods. And to receive unstinted praise, thick gobs of flattery, from his band of bullies, from his brothers in trade and from all the ragtag and bobtail of the beach, was his idea of what was due him and his position.

For One-Eyed Jack was a vain man. He was vain of his prowess, and, oddly enough, of his personal appearance. Yet not so odd after all. He admired toughness.

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It is not every pirate who can look like a pirate; he usually looks like a parson. But Mr. Cotton not only was the true Buccaneer of the Barbary Coast; he looked the part as well as played it.

His face had escaped from the Spanish Main. It was a battered, leering, sinister face, grotesquely brutal in its deformity. He may have been born good-looking, but his life had brought his features into so many violent collisions with hard objects that their original aspect was lost. It could be truly said of One-Eyed Cotton that his own mother would not know him.

Shock of combat had flattened his nose at the bridge and askewed it at the tip; the same cause had slanted his jaw toward his other shoulder. Quite early in his crimping career a Scandinavian seaman, making violent and unreasonable protest against being separated from the land, had kicked out one of Mr. Cotton's eyes with the heel of a No. 12 sea-boot.

The remaining eye, by reason of the malformed nose, seemed situated in the center of Mr. Cotton's forehead, almost in line with his goatee, and, adapting itself to the requirements of Mr. Cotton's busy life, it had a way of popping out of its cave and sweeping a wide arc in defensive survey. Despite the green patch that covered the eyeless socket, it could not be said of One-Eyed Cotton that he had a blind side. As for his body, it was a barrel in fact and appearance.

A GOOD deal of One-Eyed Jack's reputation as a bad man was based upon his looks. Sailortown regarded his grim, gargoyle face with awe. For years his title of champion rough and tumble fighter of the port had not been seriously questioned.

Until that regrettable incident, now six weeks past, when Captain Sweet had so basely surprized him and so deeply wounded both his flesh and his spirit. Jack Cotton had quaffed deep of the bitter cup of humiliation since that day. He knew that the story of how Poop-deck Sweet had kicked Cotton off the ship was the prize yarn in every barroom of sailortown. He knew men told and retold the yarn and smacked their lips over it. He knew he was being pointed out to strangers as the bad man Sweet had tamed and pitched overboard. He had not known a happy moment since spitting upon the poop-deck. He felt himself the laughing-stock of the port and his soul writhed.

He had plotted revenge, of course. A bloody revenge, easily accomplished—he and his Rats would meet Sweet coming out of the Clipper Bar some night and make jelly of him. But Shanghai Brown and Gentleman Boyle firmly vetoed this scheme. With sky-pilot reformers thundering against the gang, and newspapers hostile, it was no time, they said, to lay finger in anger upon the well-known captain of a well-known ship.

"Nothing like that, Jack!" exclaimed Shanghai Brown. "I tell you I got the word from the Big Boss himself, up-town. 'Tell Cotton he can't manhandle Sweet. We can't stand the publicity.' Them's his very words, Jack."

Mr. Cotton said that Captain Sweet was a blankety blank blank and other things.

"How am I going to pay him off for what he done to me?" he demanded.

"Now, man, can't you think of anything save physical force?" queried Gentleman Boyle. "A refined revenge. Why not rob him?"

"Tit for tat. He used his fists on me," answered Cotton.

"Boyle is right," said Shanghai Brown. "If you want revenge on Poop-deck Sweet, nick him in the pocket. He's tight, so tight he creaks. Take some money away from him and you'll hurt him more than you could with a length of lead pipe. Don't I know? He's bought his crews from me and thrown a fit over the regular port prices.

"I tell you what to do, Jack—when Sweet is ready for sea, you sell him his crew. We'll pass the word along that no one else is to give him a single man. You can boost the blood-money out of sight and make him pay it. We'll hold you up for a three-way split of the pot, of course. He'll squeal like a pig, Jack, and get in trouble with his owners, most likely."

Though, as recounted, Mr. Cotton adopted this scheme, it failed to satisfy him. It seemed a thin revenge. Lining his pocket-book at Poop-deck Sweet's expense was pleasant enough, but it did not repay the indignity he had suffered at Sweet's hands. No matter what sum he made Sweet pay, he would not be reestablished in his self-esteem. He would still be the butt

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of the barroom joke, the man Sweet had kicked off his ship. Making the shipmaster pay through the nose for a crew would be expected of him; he needed to deal Sweet some unexpected blow to set the town laughing on the other side of its mouth.

This was the reason for his intense interest in the tale of the Finn. For, as the weeks passed, the idea of revenging himself upon Captain Sweet became an obsession with One-Eyed Jack. He dreamed vengeance day and night, wild dreams that ranged from shanghaiing Sweet into a lime-juicer to scuttling the *Josiah P. Quigley* as she lay at anchor. He could think of no scheme that was practical. Nor did the news of the break between Poop-deck Sweet and Ginger Starr suggest a proper revenge. Not at the moment. But anything unpleasant happening to Sweet pleased him, and the black eye the Finn told of actually delighted him. He mused upon that eye. He imagined his fist causing it. He was conscious of a vast friendliness toward Ginger Starr. A man after his own heart.

His curiosity about that eye was so keen he made it his business to be upon the boat wharf that afternoon when Captain Sweet was returning to his ship. Meanwhile, fresh developments in the feud gave the gossips plenty of material to tongue. Sweet and Starr had faced each other across the shipping commissioner's table and sworn themselves black in the face. Sweet had refused the bonus Starr claimed and the infuriated mate vowed the master would wish he had paid it ten times over ere he was many days older.

Subsequently the two met upon East Street, and only the presence of mutual friends and three policemen prevented Sweet getting his other eye blacked. Ginger Starr was "three sheets in the wind," it was said, and hinting darkly to friends and bartenders that he knew a way to humble the arrogant and faithless captain. The water-front predicted he would attempt something between barratry and murder before the week was out. All which news interested One-Eyed Jack.

Captain Sweet's eye was all that Mr. Cotton could have desired. It was a beautiful black eye, with purple streamers halfway down the cheek. It showed up like a side-light and gave Captain Sweet, for all his dignity of flesh and bearing, a dissolute and bedraggled appearance. Mr. Cotton planted himself fair in the skipper's course and feasted his eye upon the other's eye.

The captain stopped and his unwounded optic glared at the crimp. The boarding-master's presence and attitude was a sore affront, the crowning indignity of a day of indignities. He had not been so humiliated for years as today, parading his misused person before the world. He was sorry he had called upon the mate for assistance or embarked in the latter's crazy blind-man's game, of which he could make neither head or tail. And here before him, gloating over his discomfiture, was the crooked-faced swab who caused it all.

"Well, sir, have you come to tell me you have my crew ready?" he demanded harshly of Mr. Cotton.

"Not yet, captain," retorted Cotton. "I'm thinking you'll want to ship a mate first, anyway—to handle 'em for you. Don't you want me to get you a mate, captain? Same price as the men."

The veins of Captain Sweet's forehead swelled and his unbruised eyelid fluttered rapidly. He distinctly heard the snickers of bystanders. It was unendurable.

"Bloodsucker!" he hissed at the crimp and, stumbling hurriedly down the steps, he stepped into the waiting whitehall and commanded, in a great voice, the roundheads to give way. "I want to get the taste of this rotten beach out of my mouth!" he said.

MR. COTTON was conscious of a glow of contentment pervading his being. It was the first glow of contentment he had experienced in six weeks. He felt he had the better of the passage, he, not Sweet, had advantage of the meeting. The admiring glances of the wharf-loungers confirmed his feeling. And the sight of Sweet's eye and his intuition of Sweet's humiliation gave him greater satisfaction than he had even hoped for. He returned to his Main Street stronghold with an ever-growing friendliness in his bosom for Ginger Starr.

He found Mr. Starr, brilliantly arrayed in go-ashore togs consisting of a China-blue suit, brown bowler hat, ruffled shirt and burnished boots, draped over his bar, sipping liquid lightning and confidentially explaining—in a voice audible across the

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street—to the hulking, blear-eyed Cockney who was first lieutenant of the Rats, just how bitterly he, Gideon Starr, hated Amos Sweet. The English language could not contain Mr. Starr's hatred and he was calling upon Spanish and Chinese, in which lingos he knew swear words.

One-Eyed Jack knew Ginger Starr by sight—everybody in the port who had anything to do with ships knew the celebrated Mr. Starr at least by sight—and he was not a little surprized to see Starr in his resort. He had been considering looking Mr. Starr up, and here was the man come to him without asking. There was a devil-may-care recklessness about the mate's visit that instantly commanded the crimp's admiration. For the air of the room was tensely hostile, and Starr ignored it. Yet Cotton knew, and knew that Starr knew, that there were men in that room who ached to settle old scores by tickling the bucko's ribs with a sheath-knife.

Mr. Starr did not even know One-Eyed Jack by sight, but a single glimpse of the twisted, leering face coming toward him placed the man. There could not be two such faces. Moreover, the outstretched hand and genial words of greeting told him that his plan had so far succeeded that the crimp was favorably disposed toward him. Mr. Starr had worked hard and shrewdly to put the crimp into a certain state of mind.

"I've seen you about, of course, and now I'm proud to shake hands with you, mister," said Cotton.

Mr. Starr said gravely he was proud to shake hands with Mr. Cotton.

"Hi inwited 'im 'ere to 'arve a wet, and a bit o' chat," explained the Cockney. "'E 'as troubles on 'is chest."

"Help yourself to whatever hits your fancy, Mr. Starr," said the crimp, heartily. "It's on the house."

"Thanks," replied the mate. "This whisky bites as much as the next, and I didn't wander in here to drink. I came to have a private word with you."

Cotton started with surprize. He had supposed that the visit was the result of a drunken vagary, but the hard, alert gaze that met his sharp glance informed him Mr. Starr was sober. His admiration for the other increased; he admired a hard head, having one of his own. The mate's request captured his interest.

"Get!" he said shortly to the Cockney. "We can talk here or in the back room," he told Mr. Starr when the Cockney had melted into the background.

The mate indicated the back ro m.

"I got something particular to say," he stated.

Seated in the seclusion of the inner room, with the inevitable bottle between them, the mate came to the point promptly and bluntly.

"You got a grudge against Sweet?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Mr. Cotton, grimly.

"So have I," remarked Mr. Starr.

The crimp looking into the other's hard, bitter eyes, believed him. If ever a face showed black hate, Starr's did.

"You had your crack at him," said Mr. Cotton, enviously. "I was just down to the boat wharf and saw him there. The eye is a beauty."

"That doesn't square things between me and Sweet," asserted Mr. Starr. "You know what he did to me?" Mr. Starr described in flame-colored words what Sweet had done to him. "I am going to even the score, by Heaven! And I know what Sweet did to you. A dirty trick, wholly uncalled for, I say! Don't you want to pay him back?"

"I'm making him sweat right now," said Cotton.

"Oh, aye, holding him up for his crew," commented the mate. "Well, that will make him squirm, true enough, especially if you stick him one hundred dollars a man, as he fears you will. A nice profit for you—thirty men and their advance notes too. But do you call that getting even? Why, the port will feel sorry for the swab!"

"I know," answered Cotton. "It's getting even with his owners instead of with him. But there are reasons why I can't treat him rough, as I'd like to."

"Don't have to treat him rough," said Mr. Starr. "Listen to this—I know how you can make such a fool out of the old devil he'll never dare show his face in this port again—and at the same time you'll make money, and you'll not interfere with your present plan to milk him dry before he gets to sea. That's what I call getting even, mister!"

"Mister, you're a man after my own heart!" declared the crimp. "Show me!"

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"THIS isn't a new trick," explained the canny Mr. Starr. "It was worked when I was a boy by 'Paddy' Martin, who kept a boarding-house in Baltimore. He got away with it easy, and he didn't have a city Government behind him, like you fellows have in this town."

"I can get away with anything short of laying hands on him as I'd like to," declared Cotton.

"This is even better," said Mr. Starr. "It's like this—you're not responsible for a man after you've put him on board, I know. You get your blood-money on delivery and cash the advance note after the ship sails, providing the man sails in her. And you take care he does sail in her by sending him on board drunk as a lord, with a bottle in his bag, and by keeping an eye on him until the ship is in the Stream. But once you get him on board a ship lying in the Stream you know he's safe; it's too far out, and the tides are too strong, for swimming.

"Well, that is the fact that is going to make a fool out of Sweet. It's the fact that gave me my idea. I've handled crowds in nigh every port in the world, sir, and in no port is a crowd easier to handle than in this port, once you get them away from the beach and on board. They're put, you see. You can lie out there in the Stream for a month, with a fo'c'stle filled with shanghaied stiffs who would give their souls to be ashore again, and you need not worry about losing a single man providing you keep half an eye upon visiting small craft.

"You know this as well as I. When men are scarce you send crews on board two and three men at a time, just as you get hold of them. You don't worry about their clearing out, once you get them over rail. You know their advance notes are good as hard cash, every one of them, even if it takes you a week or two to get the whole crowd together.

"What's the result of this, I ask you? Well, the result is just this—the skipper and mates of a ship lying in the Stream don't worry any more than the boarding-master about keeping sailors after they get them. They don't have to watch them like they do in some ports where getting ashore is easy. Tide-rips and distance and boarding-house booze make a mighty efficient guard against desertion. The afterguard can afford to take it easy; one man on anchor watch at night, to see they don't put a boat in the water, is all that is necessary. Now, you see what I'm driving at, don't you?"

"No, I don't," answered Cotton, a mystified look in his eye.

"Why, just this—furnish Sweet a crew and take it away from him again!"

"What's that?" cried the crimp, in an astonished voice.

"Deliver 'em on board after dark," went on Mr. Starr, "collect your blood-money and clear out. Have boats waiting under the bows—it's foggy and thick these nights, and a few whitehalls could slip under the bows while you're turning over the crowd at the gangway; they'd never be discovered, for such a trick wouldn't be suspected—and then, after you've got your money and gone, the crowd, being sober and posted, can slip over the forecastle head and away. You'll leave Sweet out of pocket and whistling for his men. You'll be safe; you'll have fulfilled your part of the contract in turning the men over and he'll not be able to prove anything against you. Why, don't you see, he'll have to come to you for another crowd."

"Well, sink me for a sucker!" said Mr. Cotton, in an awed voice. "Mister, you're being wasted at sea. But—do you really think it could be done?"

"Certainly," declared the mate.

"But old Sweet is no man's fool," said One-Eyed Jack dubiously. "Perhaps we could get away with it; it sounds easy—but Poop-deck Sweet has lost so much time already in this port he's likely to have a pilot ready and be on his way to sea the moment he gets his crew's feet upon his deck. Where would that leave us?"

"I can see you are no man's fool either," observed Mr. Starr admiringly. "You put your finger right on the spot. If the old lubber gets under way directly he gets his crowd we lose. I've thought of that. In fact the success of the scheme depends upon our putting him in a frame of mind where he won't be eager to get to sea with the first tide. Now, I know Amos Sweet, no man better, and I know how we can put him in a frame of mind where he'll be willing to stay in port, with the crowd on board, for a week, if necessary."

"Show me," demanded Cotton.

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"YOU will have to pretend to eat a little humble pie," went on Mr. Starr. "But that is all right, for it will make him seem the bigger fool later."

"I'd eat mud to get even with him!" declared the crimp venomously.

"I suppose you know that Sweet has been tyring to bring influence to bear to make you supply him a crew at once and at port prices?" asked Mr. Starr.

"Little good that did him," snorted Mr. Cotton. "His ship's agent went to his bank, and the bank went to the Big Boss, and the Big Boss just stalled—and sent word down to me I could go ahead and do what I pleased to Sweet, so long as I didn't do anything to give the newspapers a chance at the bunch. If I feel like it, I can hold Sweet in port another month, and I've already told him he'll have to pay one hundred dollars a man."

"Exactly—for the second crew you sell him. But for this crew we are talking about you'll only get going prices. You'll first of all have to let Sweet think he has beaten you. Send him word tonight or tomorrow he can have his crew at regular terms."

"Not much, I won't!" exclaimed Mr. Cotton.

"Then Sweet will go around bragging what a clever bird he is," continued Mr. Starr, without noticing the other's interjection. "He'll tell the whole water-front how he made you come to his terms."

"And you call that getting even?" demanded Mr. Cotton in an amazed and disgusted voice.

"Yes, for we're getting him into the necessary frame of mind," explained the mate. "When Sweet's conceit is stirred, he can't think of anything or anybody except himself. Don't I know?

"Well, we get him to loving himself all over town in this way, and he won't have any time to feel suspicious. Then you get your crowd together. You won't have any trouble there. You can pick men you can trust, so long as they look like seamen. Sweet will never think of coming down here to look them over; he wouldn't demean himself, and anyway he'll be busy blowing his horn at the Clipper Bar. This being a free and easy port, he'll do what he has always done when buying crews from Brown—he'll send his articles ashore to you with a request for thirty men.

"You sign thirty men and get the shipping commissioner's hand and seal on the paper. You can get that easily, I know."

"The commissioner is my man; I got him his job," said Cotton. "He'll sign a corpse if I tell him to."

"This time he'll sign thirty names—pick 'em out of the city directory if you like—and you get the crowd together, keep them sober and tell them what they are supposed to do," continued Mr. Starr. "Take them out to the ship, not thirty men, but twenty-nine. One shy, you see? Tell Sweet that one man got away from you. Tell him you can fill the gap in the morning, but intimate, sort of longingly, that you'll be glad if he goes to sea with an empty bunk, for you're sick of the whole business.

"I know Sweet. I know just what he will do. His conceit will be so tickled he'll blow up. He'll rave. He'll demand the missing man. If he has any idea of getting away to sea on the minute, he will give it up and stay in port a week, if necessary, just for the satisfaction of lording it over you.

"And we only want him to decide to lay over the tide. Just an hour or two, really, until you can get clear of the ship and things quiet down on board. Then the boys can slip out of the fo'c'stle and over the bows and away.

"By Heaven, Cotton, think of it! Think how Sweet will feel when he finds an empty fo'c'stle in the morning. Think of the howl that will go up in this port when the trick is discovered. This port. Why, the yarn of what Jack Cotton did to him will follow him around the world. He'll be laughed off the sea!"

"Sink me for a sucker!" was One-Eyed Jack's admiring gasp.

"And not a chance of a come back at you," added Mr. Starr. "That's the best part of it. He'll have just thirty names on his articles, that's all, for which he will have paid you twenty dollars a name. They won't be the names of anybody in particular, so there is no chance of him rounding up anybody. He'll have to come crawling to you for another crew, and then you can stick him the one hundred dollar price."

"Mr. Starr, I take off my hat to you, sir," announced Mr. Cotton solemnly.

"Well, I have got a trick or two up my sleeve," acknowledged Mr. Starr, modestly. "I'm a surprizing man, Mr. Cotton. I'm

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known for my surprizes. And I think this will surprize that measly miser, Sweet. It will hurt the old devil more than anything else I can think of. That is, if you will do it."

"Will a duck swim?" said the crimp succinctly.

"It's not only getting even, it's getting rich, too," expounded the mate. "It will be like picking up six hundred dollars in the street."

"What is your idea of a fair cut for yourself," queried Cotton, cautiously.

"Not a red cent," declared Mr. Starr promptly. "It is my scheme and I'll help you all I can. I want to be in at the finish. But I don't want any of the money, not a cent of it. I'm doing this for revenge, sir. I told that swab I owed him a grudge for playing me that scurvy trick. Well, I'm paying my debt."

The mate's face was bleak, his voice harsh, and Mr. Cotton could see that Starr was filled to the brim with a cold, implacable hatred of the man he plotted against. Mr. Cotton had the kindliest feeling for Mr. Starr. Had not Starr just shown him a sure way to satisfy his own black hatred? And make money? There was a hint of wonder in the crimp's eye as he stared at the mate's hard-bitten face—the latter's refusal to take the split of the pot to which he was justly entitled disclosed a weakness in his character that surprised Mr. Cotton. If he had not admired the cleverness of the seaman, the crimp might have despised him for his scruples. As it was, he concluded that Ginger Starr was a peculiar duck, a hard, hard case, who certainly hated his man.

Suddenly One-Eyed Jack's eye-lid blinked rapidly several times—sure sign to his intimates that a rare idea had occurred to him. He commenced to chuckle and slap his thigh.

"Huh?" queried Mr. Starr.

"I was just thinking, mister," said the crimp in heavy banter, "that the very best way to get even with Sweet would be to ship you in the *Quigley*. You love him so you'd have a lovely voyage together."

Mr. Starr made a wry face.

"I don't call that funny," he said.

VI

IT WAS a busy day.

On board the *Josiah P. Quigley* the carpenter and the boatswain were busy at a mysterious occupation that had to do with doors and bolts and bars and padlocks. In the cabin Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Thompson, the surviving mates, were busy at an occupation that was grimly suggestive—they were oiling and overhauling an array of sawed-off shotguns and revolvers, Captain Sweet's arsenal of "scatterguns and plunkers," as Ginger Starr had named them.

On the beach, from Abe Glassman's barber shop to Young's chandlery, the gossips were busy commenting upon the latest startling developments in the involved *Quigley* affair.

Ginger Starr was on the "bust" in earnest. He had been seen the night before in the Bella Union, in a condition known to the initiated as "speechless." It was sad news to the sensation-loving public.

"He'll be so busy licking 'em up he won't have time to worry Sweet!" was the way the talk went.

But the news of greatest interest was that One-Eyed Cotton had abjectly surrendered. He had gone to Poop-deck Sweet cap in hand, so to speak, and humbly agreed to supply him with a full crew at prevailing prices just as soon as he could get the men together. Startling news, indeed, for Cotton was a big fish in the water-front puddle, and all men had heard his boasting and knew his feeling toward the master of the clipper.

The knowing ones winked sagely.

"Poop-deck Sweet is a wise one," they agreed. "He's worked a pull somewhere and turned the tables on Jack. Got 'uptown' interested, and Jack couldn't stand the pressure. Lucky thing Sweet is going to sea, for there would be no standing him after this. Blowing his head off already."

Which was exactly what Captain Sweet was doing. He was laying down the law in the Clipper Bar. Forgotten was the eye and all the unpleasantness of yesterday. He stood majestic in the middle of the floor, the cynosure of the company, and told, in a fine, heavy weather voice what a smart man he was.

"That one-eyed villain is a slick article, is he?" he declaimed. "So is Amos Sweet, gentlemen. As slick as the next man, and maybe a bit slicker. I use my brains, gentlemen, in port as well as at sea, which is what every shipmaster should do. Now, how did I get the best of that swivel-eyed whisky barrel who tried to rob me? Brains, gentlemen.

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"I thought, that's what I did. About what? About government. How is this town governed, I ask you? Rotten. I agree with you. Like every other town this side of Jericho. And why, I ask you? Because a parcel of shoregoing lubbers do the governing. That's why. No man should be allowed to run a town until he's learned how to run a ship. Then things would be shipshape.

"Business men run this town, gentlemen. Like every other town. They run it to the dogs. They don't know any better. How could they, being brought up all wrong? The best they can do is to give the town over to the politicians while they go on making money. And the politicians are lubbers, too. Read the "Congressional Record," gentlemen. And the consequence is that thieving swabs like this Cotton roost at tidewater and dictate to honest seamen.

"If I had gone to these business men and said, 'I'm being robbed by this crimp,' they'd have said, 'Too bad,' and gone on making money. Not interested. But I went to them and said, 'Look here, you're losing money.' They sat up at that. Business men, you see. I said, 'You got money tied up in my ship. She's not moving. You're losing money. Because a pop-eyed crimp is holding me up. Get busy.'

"They got busy. And the politicians got busy. And now Jack Cotton is stepping lively rounding me up a crowd. Pretty slick, gentlemen, if I say so myself."

Captain Sweet paused, not for breath—talking never took his breath—but for refreshment, and to receive the admiring comments of his listeners. He received many of them, some sincere and nearly all hearty sounding. But "Blowhard" Tisdale, of the *Marigold*, who liked center stage himself, said enviously.

"Are you really sailing without Starr, captain?" in the same voice as if he said, "Are you sailing without your senses?"

Captain Sweet grew choleric.

"Captain Tisdale, sir," he stated, "you would oblige me by not uttering that person's name in my hearing again. When I'm through with a man, I'm through with him!"

"I heard as how—well, as how that person was seen taking a drink with Cotton's runner," added Tisdale hopefully.

"I'm not surprized," replied Captain Sweet. "It's just the kind of low company he would seek. I shouldn't be surprized, captain, if you told me he was taking a drink with Cotton himself."

WHICH was just what Mr. Starr was doing at that precise instant. He was sitting in that secluded room behind Cotton's bar, crooking his elbow to the success of the enterprise and the conclusion of Amos Sweet. Two other elbows crooked in unison with his, One-Eyed Jack's, and the elbow of a large, flabby, purple-nosed gentleman called "Lush," familiarly, by Cotton, and "Mr. Hayes, sir," ceremoniously, by Mr. Starr. Mr. Lush Hayes was the United States shipping commissioner of whom One-Eyed Jack had spoken the previous evening.

Mr. Starr, no matter what his condition last night in the Bella Union, was this moment anything but "speechless." The crimp was also loquacious. But the officer of the Government had trouble with his enunciation. From his complexion and the practised ease with which he emptied his glass, Mr. Starr concluded the defect of speech was permanent, or nearly so.

"Thish peculiar bishness, mus' say," was Mr. Hayes' sole verbal contribution to the discussion of the business at hand. He laid his forehead upon the table and slept.

Mr. Starr raised the sleeper's head, none too gently, and rescued the *Josiah P. Quigley's* articles, which Mr. Hayes had chosen for his pillow.

"Articles ain't supposed to be snored into," said Mr. Starr with seamanly indignation. "A nice bird, this one, for a ticklish job."

"Lush is all right," remarked Cotton. "He ain't been sober since Boyle and I got him this job. He's a good man, don't talk, don't ask questions, does what he's told. We'll wake him up when we want his John Henry on these papers."

"We're ready for it now," said Mr. Starr. "I filled them all out properly; not the first time I've done it, between you and me, Mr. Cotton. Look 'em over if you like; thirty names and descriptions."

"You read them over aloud," suggested One-Eyed Jack, who could not, as Mr. Starr had taken pains to discover, recognize anything beyond his own name in writing.

"It's a scream," averred Mr. Starr solemnly and with the proper pride of

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authorship. "Thirty names I thought up myself, all different, and all Johns, every man Jack of 'em. If Sweet ever makes this list public, after he finds he's stung, they'll laugh at him more than ever. Here you are—'John O'Flea, eyes red, hair blue——"

Mr. Cotton shook with appreciative laughter, and continued to guffaw as the mate reeled off the list of names he had compiled, as belonging to the able seamen who were to shortly call Captain Sweet their master.

"John White, John Black, John Green, John Gray," read Mr. Starr. "John er-Doe," he finished with a hint of hesitation in his voice.

"Pretty good, mister," laughed Mr. Cotton. His eyelid blinked rapidly, and there was a mirthful gleam in the eye itself. "That last—John Doe! Who's that—the missing one?"

"Yes, the missing one," answered Mr. Starr merrily.

"Pretty good," chuckled the crimp. "Might mean any one. Might mean you, mister."

"Or you," said Mr. Starr with a responsive laugh. "But now I have the names ready, how about you? Got the men, you say?"

"Twenty-nine of 'em," affirmed Mr. Cotton. "My own crowd here is a dozen and I got some from Boyle and some from Franklin and a half dozen from the Scandinavian Sailor's Home, wise squareheads who sail on the coast. They're all in it for five dollars a head and the fun of the thing. And a prime lot of sailormen, taken all around, Sweet would find them, if he could get them to sea. I'll have them on Meigg's Wharf at eight o'clock tonight and take them out by tug. Flathead"—Mr. Cotton's name for the Finnish gentleman—"will take charge of them when they get on board, and for'rd."

"They know what to do?" demanded Mr. Starr.

"Sure. You explained it yourself to Flathead," replied Mr. Cotton. "They wait till I'm clear of the ship a half hour or so, or until things quiet down aft. Then they skeedaddle over the bows. If they make any noise and any one comes from aft to see what's the matter, they tap him on the head. Oh, I'm not worrying about their getaway, Mr. Starr. They're heeled and sober, and these boys of mine, at least, are no Sunday-school saints. They're proper nuts, mister, and all the afterguard of the *Quigley* couldn't hold them down. No, not even if you were still on board her, Mr. Starr, and you're a tough customer, I'll admit!"

"Ahem—perhaps," agreed Mr. Starr, rather grimly. "And how about the whitehalls. No slip there?"

"No chance," said Cotton. "The Cockney is looking after the boats. They'll be on the bay before us. By the looks of it, it will be foggy, cloudy at any rate. The tide will be ebbing and they'll drop down upon the ship just as soon as I get clear. I'll show a light from the tug to signal them."

"I'd like to see it," mused Mr. Starr "But I'd only take up room in a whitehall and it wouldn't be wise for me to go on the tug, for if they spotted me they would get suspicious."

"Maybe we can fix it so you can go along," suggested Mr. Cotton.

"Wouldn't be safe," decided Mr. Starr, dismissing the subject. "Better rouse your friend here and get his fist and seal on these papers."

"But you'll come down to the wharf to see us off?" insisted Mr. Cotton.

"Oh, aye—and to see you back," promised the mate. "I wouldn't miss it for the world!"

Mr. Cotton slapped his thigh, and delivered himself of a relieved chuckle.

"It will be rich, mister, rich!" he said.

VII

CAPTAIN SWEET stood in the lighted main-deck entrance to his cabin, watching, with almost unbelieving eyes, his longed-for crew come aboard. Despite his strenuous labors of the past thirty-six hours and the terse notes of appraisal and instruction he had received from Mr. Starr, the climax to him smacked of the miraculous. It was too good to be true.

One-Eyed Jack, standing by the skipper's side, felt almost the same way about it. Everything was going his way. He had been the first over the rail, and his first words to Captain Sweet were——

"Leaving this tide, captain?"

"Not ready," was Captain Sweet's growling and ungracious response. "Why—haven't you brought me a full crowd as you promised?"

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"Yes, sir, thirty men—all prime sailor-men," answered the crimp.

He experienced a delicious thrill and repressed an impulse to slap his thigh and laugh aloud. Things were certainly going his way. When this big-headed fool by his side discovered his fo'c'stle bunks empty in the morning, save for one bunk which contained the man of all men he least wished to look upon—oh, it was rich!

"They are all prime stiffs, you mean," remarked Captain Sweet. "Look at 'em, listen to 'em. Full to the guards with your rotgut! Take a week to sweat it out of them!"

Mr. Cotton chuckled audibly at this. He couldn't help it. Ginger Starr's fertile mind had caused the captain's comment. In the thin fog and the darkness, which was accentuated rather than dispelled by the lantern at the gangway, the men coming over the rail were hardly discernible as to feature. But there was no mistaking their condition. They were drunk, all hands. They waved bottles and shouted and sang and staggered ostentatiously on their way forward.

"Who ever heard of a crew going on board sober in San Francisco?" Mr. Starr had said. "Give them bottles of cold tea and tell them to play drunk. They've all been full so often they ought to know how to act!"

Presently an unconscious man was handed over the rail by his fellows and carried forward.

"What's wrong with him? Have an extra bottle?" queried the captain sarcastically.

"No; he thought he'd duck, back there on the wharf, so I tapped him on the head," replied Mr. Cotton. "You want to keep an eye on that fellow, captain. Bad egg. He's the last man signed on—bottom of the list."

The captain grunted indifferently.

"All on board, mister?" he called to Mr. Snodgrass.

"Yes, sir," answered the latter from the gangway. "Thirty men—and not such a bad lot. Good beef!"

"Then tell that tug to shove off until this man is ready to go ashore," ordered the captain. "I won't have the lubber mussing up my side in the dark. Then go for'rd and lend Mr. Thompson a hand. You, sir —" he turned to Mr. Cotton— "come into the cabin and we'll settle our little affair!"

Mr. Cotton faced the captain across the brightly lighted cabin table with a hand to his mouth to hide a grin. He was not offended by Sweet's surliness. It made the joke the richer.

"You'll find everything fixed up proper there, captain," he said, indicating the articles, which lay upon the table.

"Humph—no doubt," responded the skipper. "You boarding - masters could ship the devil and make it appear legal!" He skimmed the pages rapidly, glanced sharply at the commissioner's signature and seal, and then, looking up, glanced earnestly at the clock in the cuddy. "You know these men? You stand by these signatures, of course?"

"Why, of course," responded the crimp, surprized. "But—you know my business, captain. I contract to supply you men. The names go with the men. Thirty men, thirty names—all down there plain and proper. Thirty Johns, from John O'Flea, the first, to John Doe, the thirtieth. You can call them what you please when you get them outside. From what I've heard of your sea manners, captain, it won't be anything nice."

"They'll be called what they deserve to be called," retorted Captain Sweet. "After all, you're right. What does a name matter? John Smith, John Doe, John Cotton —one John is as good as another. What counts is the beef."

"Good beef, these," said Mr. Cotton. "You heard your mate say so. A prime lot, captain. You'll be surprized when you go forward in the morning and size them up. I say you will. And dirt cheap, captain. Twenty dollars a head, six hundred dollars for the lot."

"No thanks to you I get them at that price," said Captain Sweet sourly.

"No, sir, I admit you beat me at my own game," said Mr. Cotton, with mock humility.

"You bet I beat you!" declared Captain Sweet emphatically. He noticed that the crimp was staring fixedly at his disfigured eye and unconsciously he raised his hand to cover it. "What the devil are you staring at?" he cried.

"Nothing, sir, nothing," assured Mr. Cotton hastily.

"Humph!" grunted Captain Sweet, glancing again toward the clock.

"Have you shipped a new mate?" added One-Eyed Jack maliciously.

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"None of your business, sir!" snapped the other. "Here—you sign this receipt and I'll get you your money. A debt is a debt, and I don't want to be in your debt a minute longer than I can help!"

MR. COTTON smilingly and laboriously scrawled his name upon the paper the captain shoved before him. The latter disappeared into his berth and reappeared a moment later holding in his hand a weighted coin bag. He came to the table and soberly counted out thirty twenty-dollar gold pieces.

"Thanks," said Mr. Cotton, pocketing the heavy pile. "That squares us, captain."

Captain Sweet's fingers unconsciously touched his eye again.

"Some things ain't so easily squared, my man," he said grimly.

He suddenly started, as did his companion. Together they cocked their ears toward the noises that came in from the deck, muffled shouts and muffled thumpings, that had started suddenly and seemed to come from a long distance.

"That's your prime lot," said Captain Sweet in a more genial voice. "A bit rowdy tonight. But I'll tame them quickly enough."

"Ha, ha, I bet you will, sir!" agreed Mr. Cotton.

But his laugh was a feeble effort. He had a sudden feeling as if he had swallowed a piece of ice, a feeling that something was wrong.

"They've found out they're locked up, and raising a bit of row about it," added Captain Sweet easily.

"Locked up!" echoed Mr. Cotton.

"Of course," confirmed the captain. "You didn't suppose I'd go to all this trouble, getting a black eye and everything, without making sure I'd keep the crew when I got it. The carpenter and the bo'sun have been working all day fixing the fo'c'stle doors so an elephant couldn't break them open. And if that mob does break out—why there are my mates, and Chips and the boatswain, with shotguns. Don't worry, Mr. Cotton, they're safe enough!"

Mr. Cotton gulped. His cheeks, so ruddied by countless tipples of rock and rye, were suddenly become the color of dough. He rocked upon his feet and put a hand upon the table edge to steady himself. His bulging eye was filled with stark horror; he seemed to be looking at some dread specter instead of into the open, complacent countenance of Captain Sweet.

A loud double explosion forward, followed by loud, dolorous howls. Captain Sweet yawned and looked at the clock again.

"W-what was that?" Mr. Cotton managed to gasp.

"That?" was the answer. "Why—I guess that must have been the sailmaker emptying two barrels of birdshot over the bows, at something he saw in the water!" Captain Sweet smiled sweetly. Then he suddenly snapped out in a vicious voice, "I hope he tickled them good!"

Mr. Cotton was incapable of further speech that instant. He half turned, as if to rush from the cabin, but the sound of heavy, running footsteps approaching held him where he was. A second later a short, stout man in immense leather seaboots stood framed in the alleyway entrance to the cabin. The crimp's startled eye fastened upon the revolver upon his hip and the sawed-off shotgun in his hand.

"What was that noise, bo'sun?" demanded Captain Sweet.

"White'alls trying to 'ook our martingale, sir," was the reply from the newcomer. "Sails let go at 'em. They're gone."

Mr. Cotton groaned.

"What's become of the tug that mob of stiffs came alongside in?" asked the captain.

"Gone," said the boatswain. "Mr. Snodgrass said as how he'd make a hash of that dago at her wheel if he didn't light out for the beach, and he lit. 'Most there by now, sir."

Mr. Cotton opened and closed his mouth several times in an odd, fish-like way.

"The tug with the port crowd to get us under way is coming up," added the boatswain.

"Has Mr. Starr come on board?" asked Captain Sweet, glancing at the clock again.

Mr. Cotton collapsed weakly into a chair.

"Why, that's just it," said the boatswain. "You know that stiff one they carried on board, captain? Well, they left him on the fore'atch when they went below. Dead to the world, he was. And when we come to look at him, s'elp me, it was Mr. Starr, with a lump on his head the size of my fist!"

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"Lord bless me!" cried the captain.

"Not hurt bad," explained the boatswain. "We been dousing him with water from the washdeck tub and he's coming around. Leastways, he's beginning to swear."

This last was evident to the ears in the cabin. Loud, bitter curses came ripping through the night air, growing louder and more bitter as they drew nearer.

"He's coming aft," said the boatswain. "Here he is, sir."

He flattened himself against the wall to give passage to the hot-voiced newcomer.

It was a scarecrow, a tattered, furious, flaming-tongued scarecrow, who burst in upon them. One glimpse of him and Captain Sweet fell into a chair and roared with laughter.

It was Gideon Starr, but in a new reincarnation. Gone was the immaculate sea-dandy who had so ably counseled Mr. Cotton. This fellow who stood with spraddled legs before the cowering crimp and swore from his soul in half-articulate bellows was reminiscent of the gutter. He was barefooted and bare headed, with the lump on his head whereof the boatswain spoke plainly visible. His nakedness was covered only by a flimsy, ragged, filthy suit of dungarees. He owned not even a singlet, and his coat, hanging open, exposed to view the brig under topsails tattooed upon his laboring chest.

"You—you—you!" roared Mr. Starr at his prey.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Captain Sweet at Mr. Starr. "You said you'd surprize me, mister, and by Heaven you've done it. Haw, haw. Gone and got yourself shanghaied! I'm surprized. Haw, haw, haw!"

"The black-hearted crook!" raged Mr. Starr. "He coaxed me down to the wharf and had that flatheaded runner of his slip up behind me and bowl me over with a blackjack. Just look at me, sir."

He swung upon Cotton again and shook a finger as thick as a young belaying-pin under the terrified man's nose.

"Where's my suit?" he demanded. "Where's my watch and chain? Where's the seven dollars and eighty-five cents I had in my pocket? Where, you——"

Mr. Starr told Mr. Cotton he was a blank, blank, blank, and that he also had other faults.

MR. COTTON looked into the blazing eyes and pitiless face of the mate and his bowels were water.

"I demand protection," he appealed to the captain in a weak voice. "I demand to be put ashore."

"You demand?" cried Mr. Starr. "Why, you—you—" Words failed him. His eye roved wildly and fell upon the table. He snatched up the papers and thrust them into One-Eyed Jack's face. "Do you know who you are?" he asked, in forced calm. "I'll tell you. You are John Cotton, able seaman on this ship. Hah—you shanghaied me for the thirtieth man, didn't you? I was to be 'John Doe,' hey? 'John Doe,' my eye. Here's the last name in black and white and attested by that drunken roustabout to make it genuine. You can read your own name. See it? John Cotton."

Mr. Cotton staggered to his feet.

"It's a lie," he said, in a shaky voice. "I didn't sign that!"

He turned to the captain.

"What's in a name? Beef is the thing," said the captain softly.

"You can't do it! I'll have the law on you!" cried Cotton desperately.

"You'll have the law on me?" laughed the captain. "What can you do, my man? Any more than those other fools for'rd! We'll be outside in a couple of hours."

"But they're sailors," expostulated the crimp. "I'm not."

"I'll make you one," promised Mr. Starr grimly.

Mr. Cotton groaned aloud with his great fear as he looked from the bitter, vengeful face of the mate to the cold, disdainful face of the master. He became abject.

"For God's sake, let me go ashore!" he pleaded. "If you take me with you those men for'rd will murder me!"

"If they don't I'll make you wish they had," said Mr. Starr.

"Well, I've been thinking," said Captain Sweet. "Mr. Starr surprized me, and now I think I'll surprize him. I think I'll let you go, Cotton!"

"I'll be —— if you do!" shouted the mate in an astounded voice.

"Mister!" exclaimed the captain. "I'm master here!"

"But this is my scheme," exclaimed Mr. Starr. "And besides the swab double-crossed me—he shanghaied me on my own ship!"

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"Double-cross!" said One-Eyed Jack bitterly.

"Just a minute!" interposed Captain Sweet. "I said I'd let him go—but only on condition."

"Yes; what is it?" asked Mr. Cotton quickly.

"That you square it with Mr. Starr, here," announced Captain Sweet virtuously. "You haven't treated him right, that's plain. Luring an innocent feller down on a dock and banging him on the head with a blackjack ain't good manners any way you look at it. Besides, there's his clothes and watch and money he was robbed of—some of your crowd is drinking them up already, I dare say. So then, if you want to go ashore on the tug, when she casts us off outside, you'll have to square things with Mr. Starr. And I think if you give him that six hundred dollars you got in your pants' pocket he'll call it even. Hey, mister?"

Mr. Starr looked at his captain dazedly. Then a glint of admiration crept into his eyes.

"Why didn't I think of that?" he exclaimed.

He commenced to laugh.

Mr. Cotton seemed near tears. Slowly, very slowly, he drew his coin bag out of his pocket, and even more slowly he counted out the thirty gold pieces upon the table.

"And you call me a robber!" he said slowly.

"So you are," said Captain Sweet shortly. "Bosun!" he called to that worthy, who was still in the entrance. "Show Mr. Cotton on deck and keep an eye on him. He poisons the air here, and he'll poison the ship till we get rid of him."

"You'd better shift into some clothes, mister," he added to the mate. "We're weighing anchor directly. And, mister, when we get outside and you've turned-to that mob, have the bo'sun break out the holystones. The poop-deck is in a shocking state, sir!"

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Plain Blanket Indian

A Most Immoral Story

by

E·S·PLADWELL

Author of "The Sea Lawyer," "The Boss of Mirage," etc.

HE WAS hard to deal with and he looked it. His aboriginal face, sliding down from a conical dome and narrow eyes, bulged forward to a spread nose, a wide mouth and a massive, underslung jaw that made him appear like the original abysmal brute. His complexion was a coppery gray, like that of an old wine-cask. His age was fifty-six or seventy-two—no one knew or cared. He lived, with six dogs and numerous relatives, in a dirty old tumble-down shanty among the oaks and willow trees of Crow Creek.

Concerning a matter of selling his Crow Creek domicile at a good figure, he was perfectly able to balk the president of the Gila City Chamber of Commerce and two real estate agents without moving a muscle, even though they begged, argued, threatened, swore and raved.

"I won't sell," he grunted for the hundredth time while the three baffled gentlemen writhed in the shade of an oak-tree near his shanty.

President John L. Watts of the Gila City Chamber of Commerce, his face reddening under its Van Dyke beard, produced a silk handkerchief and mopped his perspiring brow. The Indian's monumental stubbornness made Watts feel like a gnat trying to move Gibraltar, but defeat was unthinkable.

"Now look here, old man," he persuaded, "perhaps you haven't fully grasped the situation. Lord St. Vincent, head of a wealthy English syndicate, is here to establish the finest stock and cattle ranch ever seen in the West. Think of it, man—think what it means!"

President Watts waved an expressive hand toward rolling green pasturelands that spread in a vast panorama to the distant brown mountains.

"This syndicate is planning to establish a ranch that runs from Pilot Peak to the county line, packed with the choicest collection of horses and cattle that money can buy. The syndicate's willing to spend millions. They want to make this the most perfect ranch in the world. There will be concrete sheds and silos, ornamental fences, big residences for the managers, a hotel for the help, spur-tracks from the railroad, irrigation-ditches, truck-gardens and nurseries, giving employment to scores of our citizens. Think of it! All they want is your land to make it complete!"

For the first time the Indian moved, hitching a gallus tighter over a sweaty gingham shirt.

"I won't sell," he grunted again. "You lemme alone."

The angular frame of President John L. Watts convulsed with irritation, but he simply would not admit defeat.

"Why not? Lem Knox is willing to sell

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the Three Bar K and Phil Jennings will let the syndicate have his Esmeralda ranch. If they can sell, why can't you? They have a hundred acres to your one!"

"Let 'em sell," acquiesced the Indian.

Watts jiggled on his toes.

"But—confound it, man—your little Crow Creek ranch runs right between the other two! The Englishmen won't buy two tracts when they're separated like that! Can't you see you're holding up the whole deal? Can't you see——?"

"I won't sell. Lemme alone."

President Watts clenched his fists and made a last desperate appeal to reason.

"Look here, Henry Harris, I'll tell you something. You know those people over at New Era—always knocking Gila City and trying to put something over on us? Well, they've sent a delegation to offer a big ranch to Lord St. Vincent! If we can't deliver in five days—then Gila County loses the chance of its lifetime. Do you see?"

"I won't sell."

"But what—what is the matter? Isn't the price right?. We've offered you thirty thousand dollars for five hundred unimproved acres. How much more do you want?"

"I won't sell—got ranch now, got house, got horse, got flivver. Lemme alone!"

"But you can buy a place better than this. How about a trade? We'll give you a ranch and cash to boot."

"I don't care. I got ranch now. I got cash. You go to the devil."

John L. Watts refused to go there. He knew that the Gila City Chamber of Commerce and the Gila County Real Estate Board were all excited about this proposed ranch merger, and he could not admit failure. It promised to be the most important transaction in the history of the county—a deal that meant increased prosperity for years to come.

"But—but why?" stammered President Watts, helplessly.

"Home of my people, long time ago," mumbled the Indian.

"Oh, rats!" contradicted one of the real estate agents. "You bought this ranch six years ago from a drunken Mexican for five hundred dollars! What are you trying to give us?"

"Shush!" pleaded President Watts, grasping the shoulder of the belligerent one. "It's no time to quarrel. The situation is too serious. Back up a little."

Watts drew his two companions slightly away for a conference.

"That Indian's stubborn," he remarked.

"Stubborn? He's stood off seven delegations in two days!" snorted the angry real estater. "Would it do any good to beat him up?"

"Oh, no, no, no! Tut, tut!" chided President Watts, hastily. "Why, sir—it seems to me your suggestion borders on the unethical!"

"Well, we have to do something! Can't we jolly this here Duke of St. Vitus into taking the two divided ranches?"

"Absolutely not! We have gone into that already."

"He may be an English duke, but he's from Missouri all the time," chimed in the second real estater. "He has more sense than he looks."

"Then I guess I'm through."

A happy thought came to President Watts.

"Why not have this Indian present at the Chamber of Commerce banquet tomorrow night in honor of Lord St. Vincent?"

"What? Him? That gorilla-faced Apache among the dress suits? What's the use of spoiling everybody's dinner?"

"But if those present—er—made him feel their good fellowship and appealed to his better nature on behalf of the entire citizenry of Gila City—that is, if they could exert upon him the proper psychological influence and—er——"

"Jolly him along till he signs on the dotted line," translated the real estate man. "I get you. Go to it! We'll make him think he's King of Dahomey!"

President Watts turned and with appropriate words extended the invitation to the Indian. The latter looked startled, then suspicious.

"I won't sell," he reiterated.

"Never mind that," replied the virtuous John L. Watts. "We only desire the pleasure of your attendance, sir, at this great meeting of the representative citizens of Gila County."

The Indian could not see where his rights would be jeopardized, and curiosity and a sense of importance arose within him. Also, it promised a free jollification.

"Um, I go, maybe. Damfino."

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"Come along," urged the aggressive eal estate man. "You'll have the time f your life—special music, fine talks, a egular English duke, dancers from the heaters, and big eats. It's in the Hotel Gila, starting at six-thirty. Come along!"

The Indian weakened.

"I go to town anyhow," he mumbled. 'All right, I go."

HENRY HARRIS kept his word, but his actions prior to the banquet were somewhat unusual. He flivvered into Gila City on a hot and dusty road which soon turned his black store-clothes to drab brown, and parked his tin steed in front of Cohen's Mammoth Incorporated Dry Goods Emporium, going directly inside.

In ten minutes he was being served by the assistant manager. The old buck Indian purchased, among other things, a new bed, a *chaise longue*, two hammocks, a Morris chair, one croquet set, dominos, chess, checkers, backgammon, ping-pong, golf sticks, a football, two dozen decks of cards, a book of Hoyle, six cases of soft drinks, a cut glass punch bowl, one gross boxes of chocolates, some fancy crackers, sixty dollars worth of assorted tobacco, a serving-table, an ice-box and a case of perfumery.

He next visited Samuels' Palace of Music, across the street, and bought a grand piano with a player attachment, a hundred dollar phonograph, and seventy-six records. Then he entered some other establishments. He only quit buying when the stores closed, just before the great banquet started in the Palm Room of the Hotel Gila.

The Palm Room looked like some colorful conservatory, with red and white flowers everywhere. The Gila City Symphony Orchestra, behind a great black and gold Japanese screen, sent forth strains of sweet harmony. A thousand well-groomed gentlemen, seated about white tables shimmering with silver and cut glass, made the place resound with good-natured chatter.

President John L. Watts of the Gila City Chamber of Commerce presided at the speakers' table where the masters of politics and finance were aligned in a solid rank. Close to the chairman sat Judge Thomas Lawrence of the Superior Court and between them, looking like some gaunt Kitchener with a droopy yellow mustache, was the guest of honor—Sir William St. Vincent, fifteenth Earl of Chamberford.

The old buck Indian, a little awkward, was ushered to the end of the speaker's table by a sniffing waiter. A special committee immediately started to make him feel at home.

"That's him," mumbled the uniformed chief of police to a detective standing behind him at one of the further tables. "Keep your eyes peeled for trouble. If he doesn't sell that ranch tonight somebody's liable to start something."

"The crowd looks peaceful enough to me," observed Detective Regan, glancing over the serried rows of dress suits.

"Oh, it isn't these people. It's a lot of down-town sports and ranch hands, waiting outside. Watch out! The whole town's excited. You don't realize what a big thing this is. We haven't been so aroused since old 'Bull' Judson broke loose."

Old Bull Judson was seated further down at the same table, looking like some villainous Santa Claus with his left eye shot out in a bygone feud and his snowy beard trailing toward the table. Once the terror of Gila County—gunman, cattle-rustler, train-robber and killer, pursued by posses from El Paso to the Colorado River—he had allowed time to outlaw the many charges against him and, after one violent outbreak, the old sinner had accepted the friendship of the city. He was now a public institution, like the Gallery of Pioneers in the Gila Museum.

He had left his mountain home by special invitation to attend this banquet. He was one of the official sights of the town and they could not ignore him. Furthermore, they planned to introduce him to the earl as one of the interesting specimens of bygone days when romance and six-shooters flourished. From some illegal source the old ruffian had managed to obtain refreshments and now he was just pleasantly jingled, so that his one belligerent eye looked almost friendly. Some wags had put him into a dress suit, with stockings and pumps to match. He lolled in his chair and listened to the conversation.

"The Indian didn't care what he bought," came a voice from up the line. "He took thirty obscure grand opera records without a murmur. Said he didn't care what it was so long as it played."

"I sold him a movie outfit and twenty

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reels," spoke a voice alongside old Judson. "He said it was too much trouble to come to town. That Indian's fixing for a workless year—nothing to do but smoke, eat, see the movies and listen to the music!"

"Who's this?" demanded old Bull Judson.

"Henry Harris—the Indian who won't sell his ranch. That's him over there."

"Heh!" ejaculated the old ruffian scornfully. "Blanket Injun! Plain, ornery blanket Injun! I remember——"

President Watts, at the speakers' table, clanged on a glass with his knife and a general silence ensued. The ceremonies had begun.

President Watts, in a few graceful words, spoke of the great honor granted Gila City by the distinguished presence of Lord St. Vincent and the wonderful benefits to follow therefrom. Before introducing the guest of honor, however, President Watts felt that a few words might be appropriate from one of the gentlemen whose unselfish retirement from the cattle business was a great factor in this wonderful new era dawning for Gila City—Mr. Lemuel Knox of the Three Bar K ranch.

Lem Knox obliged with a few words and sat down amid great applause. Phil Jennings of the Esmeralda ranch did likewise. Then the roving eye of President John L. Watts fell upon the old Indian in the store clothes.

Watts cleared his throat and made his great mistake. He thought the proper time had come.

"WE HAVE with us this evening," began President Watts, gravely, "one whose presence portends complete success to this great undertaking which shall forever insure prosperity to our city and our county. I refer to a gentleman of noble American lineage—a gentleman who has lived among us for many years and is becoming one of us in thought and spirit, learning like the rest of us to understand the necessity and the joy of united effort which alone leads to progress. Without the co-operation of Mr. Henry Harris, our next speaker, the great wonder-farm of the West would be a dream and a mirage. With the help which I know he will give, the dream will be realized, and his will be the honor. Gentlemen—Mr. Henry Harris!"

It was put in such a way that Henry Harris must either sell or flout the whole community to its face.

A thunder of applause began. A thousand pairs of eyes looked toward the copper-black face of the old Indian. An electric current seemed to batter at the gates of his consciousness like a sledge-hammer. He turned blacker, then whiter. His fists clenched. He was cornered. He was trapped—trapped in front of a thousand white men. His hand was being forced against his will. His body convulsed, his teeth gritted and deep lines set about his terrible jaw. Slowly he arose to his feet, swaying like some uncouth gorilla.

"G-r-r-r-r!" he growled. "Wuff! You—you go to the devil!"

He drew a long, indignant breath.

"You—you throw me down!" he howled, glaring toward President Watts and shaking his fist. "You tell me to come for free feed. You give me bunk—bunk—bunk! To—with you! Whole —— chamber commerce go to ——! Huh!"

He drew another angry breath and shook both fists toward the assemblage.

"All the time white man says gimme—gimme—gimme! Injun owns ranch. White man says gimme! Long time ago Injun owned whole country. White man took it away. Still says gimme! You —— white shirts, boneheads, go to ——!"

"Ripping!" exclaimed his lordship at the speakers' table. "Perfectly ripping!"

A member of the real estate board grasped the Indian's coat.

"But—" he protested.

The irate old buck swung his fist viciously. There was a smacking sound and the gentleman in the dress suit collapsed to the floor. A thousand men were on their feet. Chairs were shoved backward. Five horrified gentlemen rushed forward to dissuade the Indian. He mistook their purpose and swung a chair over his head, lashing right and left as he made for the door. A way was cleared for him. Several persons climbed the tables. Pandemonium ensued.

"Let him go!" shrieked President Watts above the din. "For heaven's sake, let him go!"

"Beautiful!" exclaimed his lordship, standing on a chair to see it better. "Jolly party, what, what?"

"He's gone!" shouted a gentleman near the entrance.

"Heavens!" groaned President Watts. Then he turned to his lordship and gurgled

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an apology while his face reddened with mortification.

"Don't mention it!" said Sir William. "I'm beginning to enjoy your city. Lively little place, what? I'll be sorry if the deal falls through."

The wreckage was slowly cleared away. Pale-faced gentlemen went back to their places. The citizenry finally sat down and a gloomy silence enthralled it. The game was lost. Gila City's chance had gone. Realization seemed to smite every person present.

"That settles it," sighed President Watts glumly.

Far down at one of the lower tables a weird figure arose—a tall, bearded personage who looked like some baleful Santa Claus in an ill-fitting dress suit, glaring over the crowd with his one bilious eye. The old scoundrel did not address the chair. He spoke to all.

"The Injun's right!" he roared belligerently. "This here's a passel of durned fools!"

The gentlemen of Gila City stiffened, but the old ruffian did not care. He leaned forward, very earnestly.

"What's the idee of a modern chamber of commerce tryin' to deal with an old-fashioned buck Indian?" he demanded.

The audience gasped. Superior Judge Lawrence, once an Indian-fighter himself, was first to see the point. He banged a fist on the table.

"He's right!" exploded the judge. "Go on, Judson—speak!"

The assemblage, taking the lead from this important personage, began to sit up. Old Bull Judson pointed a finger toward several men with white hair and snowy beards.

"There's fifteen or twenty old-timers here and yet you've sent a passel of dude real estaters to deal with an old blanket Injun that used to fight with Geronimo! What's the matter with you people? There's Tom Lawrence, for instance, who used to be a deputy sheriff."

He pointed toward the judge and invoked the memories of past years, when the West was still West and Gila City was just a tumble-down village with six saloons and a dance-hall.

"Why didn't you git Tom to deal with that there Injun? Thirty years ago when Tom and his posse was chasin' me and my gang through the Sink Hole country we run bang into a passel of 'Patches. What happened? Did we send 'em chamber of commerce dudes in plug hats? Did we invite 'em to dress-suit banquets? Heh—we did not! Us train-robbers and Tom's posse jined hands and shot lead into them Injuns till they curled up and quit!" The old rogue showed a twinkle in his eye and he chuckled. "After that Tom's posse had pris'ners and no ca'tridges while we had ca'tridges and no pris'ners, so we got away."

The old ruffian stroked his beard and smiled a little wistfully.

"Tom knows how to handle them blanket Injuns. So does Jed Bunker, over there, who used to run a saloon and sell 'em whisky on the side. So does Storekeeper Ransome here, who used to skin 'em out of their back teeth every time——"

"Whoa!" shouted Judge Lawrence to shut off the revelations. Then he had an idea. "Why can't you handle this Indian?" he asked.

The suggestion seemed to hit the target.

"Who? Me? Well, if it ain't too late, mebbe I can. If I can't do better than this durned fool chamber of commerce I'll jine the old ladies' home!"

"This is too much!" protested the indignant President Watts, throwing down his napkin angrily.

"Go ahead and do it!" roared Judge Lawrence to Judson.

"I will!" retorted the old wolf. "If I can't git some action out of that Injun, I'll wear this danged dress suit the rest of my mis'able life! Gangway, you gents—I'm goin'!"

"But—" interposed the horrified President Watts.

"Shush!" hissed the judge. "We've tried high-class methods; now let's try some coarse work. Keep the chamber of commerce out of this for the sake of our reputations. Let that old miscreant go it alone."

"But—"

"Let him alone, everybody!" shouted the judge. "The situation is desperate. We've tried everything else; now let's try Judson. Hands off, for the honor of Gila City!"

THE chief of police caught the infection.

"Let him get away with anything short of murder!" instructed the chief of police to his detective a minute later,

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while a thousand electrified gentlemen were buzzing excitedly about this novel idea.

The detective had returned to report that the Indian was still in good health.

"It's our last chance," explained the chief. "I don't know what that old buzzard is going to do, but pass the word to let him alone. Understand?"

"But—if he breaks the law——"

"We'll talk about that later. This is a special emergency. If he puts his program through, Gila City will be behind him to a man. Let him alone!"

The detective walked out obediently but within thirty minutes he was back again, arriving in the midst of forced gaiety that masked heavy hearts.

"That old hellion's in jail!" reported the detective.

"What? How?"

"Well, there was sort of a rumpus down at Third and Jones Street. Some of these down-town sports spotted the Indian when he went out of here. They waited till he got to a dark corner and beat him up. Judson arrived and got into it. He knocked down a couple and was just pulling a six-shooter out of his dress suit when the police jumped him and put the whole bunch in jail. I hadn't had time to tip off the patrolmen."

"What's Judson in for?"

"Disturbing the peace and resisting an officer. He resisted Officer Johnson something terrible. He——"

"Get him out!" roared the chief.

"But—they're booked now. That makes it official. We can't turn 'em loose without authority. That's why I'm here."

"Turn Judson and that Indian loose!" thundered the chief. "You can have any authority you want. I'll phone right now. And say—follow them and report to me everything they do. Everything! Now hurry!"

Early next morning Detective Regan appeared before the chief, in the latter's office, with a bookfull of notes and a puzzled look on his face.

"I followed 'em," he reported, "but I don't quite understand it."

"Where's Judson and the Indian now?"

"Sleeping in the Imperial Lodging House."

"All right. Now what happened?"

The detective thumbed his book.

"Well, first off, Judson insisted on Pinky Skinner getting out of jail too. That's that little redheaded crook that's in for larceny. Judson wouldn't leave the jail without Pinky. Made so much of a rumpus that finally we got some bail for the little rat, so the three of 'em started out—Santy Claus, the Indian and the crook."

"Go on."

"Well, let's see—they went to the Crystal Motion-Picture Palace and saw 'Her Public Shame' in six reels. When they came out they looked sort of dazed, so they made for Bent's Ice Cream Parlor. They bought half a glass of lemonade each and Judson pulled out a flask and filled——"

"Never mind that," said the chief, hastily.

Arizona is a prohibition state. Another law broken!

"They went to a ham-and-eggery and ate a dozen——"

"Never mind that. Go on."

"They had another lemonade at Sparkler's and Judson pulled out a flask and filled——"

"Go on."

"By that time they were feeling pretty good. The Indian hung on to Judson's neck and said the old vulture was the first real human he'd ever seen in a dress suit. After a while they began to sing and the uniformed patrolmen all left the district. Then pretty soon Santy Claus and the Indian and the crook went into Casey's Billiard Hall and walked up-stairs to that closed room."

The detective had named a quiet gambling-place officially unknown to the police.

"Go on!" admonished the chief.

"I couldn't get near the place for nearly two hours. The room's pretty well guarded. Finally I got on the roof of the house next door, came across and climbed down a skylight into a sort of skylight-closet with a locked door. It was dark as pitch except for a little light that came from a knot-hole, so I put my eye to the hole. The Indian had his back to me."

"Go on."

"The Indian had four aces. There was a pile of money and papers on the table. Pinkey opened for a hundred. Judson raised it another hundred and Pinky

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dropped out. Then the Indian talked funny."

"How?"

"He covered the two hundred with a phonograph and a *chaise longue*. Then he raised it with a grand piano and a case of perfumery. Judson allowed him two hundred dollars and raised it five hundred more. The Indian covered it with a movie outfit and a silver carving set. Then he raised it with two hammocks, one Circassian walnut bed, a Winchester and a flivver. Judson allowed him five hundred dollars and raised it another hundred. The Indian threw in an ice-box and a sewing-machine and called."

"Well?"

"Judson had a straight flush."

"SELL?" snorted old Bull Judson in the chamber of commerce at ten-thirty that morning. "That Injun sell? Sure he'll sell. He'll sell his pants if you want 'em. Do you?"

President John L. Watts felt the color surging through his face. He could hardly believe the amazing good news.

"But I can't understand how you did it!" he gurgled. "It seems unbelievable! Heavens, man, you're a magician!"

"Magician nothin'!" grunted the old ruffian, still in the wrinkled dress suit, minus collar, tie and part of the shirt. "I had inside information."

"How?"

"Well, I found he'd bought a lot of stuff that nothin' but an ornery danged fool of a blanket Injun would load up with. He was on a spendin' jag."

"What had that to do with it?"

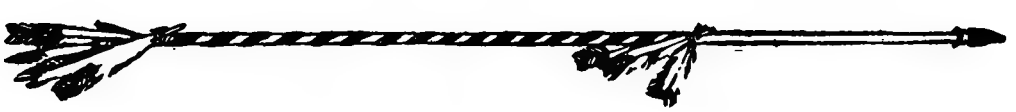
"It meant he had money, didn't it? If he had money, he was rich. If he was rich you couldn't talk to him. The more you bothered him the less you'd git!"

"But—but he couldn't have had much money!"

"No? He was jest like a millionaire! He'd sold a lot of scrub cattle! This ain't no high-class, eddicated Injun. This is jest a pore, ornery, low-down, flea-bitten blanket Injun. Five thousand dollars was as big to him as a million to you. He's pore now. He'll sell. He's broke. I broke him—me and a card sharp!"

A thoughtful expression, almost of sadness, passed over the wrinkled face of the old sinner and his one eye had a ruminative, faraway look. He seemed bewildered and somewhat regretful, standing in that wrinkled remnant of a dress suit like some queer caricature of Santa Claus, too pathetic to be ridiculous and too stern to be pathetic. President Watts, sensing that the old man was feeling qualms of conscience for his splendid though crooked performance, raised a protesting hand. But he was too late. The old reprobate sighed, speaking his bewilderment—

"What the devil am I goin' to do with a *chaise longue?*"



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Death's Carpenter

by J·ALLAN DUNN

Author of "Salt of the Sea," "The Pearls of Paruki," etc.

DR. "BIG BIRD" EMERSON came out on the hospital lawn at Lenakil as the schooner *Manu-Levu* sailed into the little harbor. Lenakil is on Tanna, southernmost but one of all the New Hebrides, and its natives recruit by thousands to the Queensland sugar plantations. When they return they peel off their slight veneer of civilization, let their hair grow, throw away their clothes and start looking for trouble. One of them had found it in the guise of a bullet from a jealous husband and Dr. Emerson was treating the case. It had meant amputation, but it had been successful, and the doctor, the *matai-ni-mate*, as the natives styled him, was feeling pleased.

He was a spare, bronzed man of about fifty, gray-haired but vigorous. As he passed down the little street with its crimson, flamboyant trees on one side and the lace of the lagoon surf bordering the other, he nodded affably to every one he met, white or native, keeping an eye on the whale-boat that was putting out from the schooner. It was painted bright scarlet, the distinguishing color of all recruiters, and manned by six bronze rowers. Three whites were seated in the stern.

Emerson did not like the recruiting trade, but any arrival brought news, so he strolled on down to the traders' landing to meet the boat. A small crowd had already gathered. The boat came up smartly, oars were tossed and the white men sprang to the wharf, the skipper, his mate and his supercargo.

"By ——!" exclaimed the skipper. "We had a close shave at Vatu Bay. It looked safe enough. No one's been there for months. None of the recruits in that neighborhood died on our hands. No trouble in sight, I figured, but the bush was thick with 'em. Lined up with trade guns and poisoned arrows. Five of 'em came out on the beach and two said they wanted to recruit. I smelled trouble somehow. They were hillmen, for one thing.

"'You belong along bush?' I says.

"'What name (why) that matter?' says they and starts in trying to get hold of our rifles. Didn't want trade guns; wanted new guns before they'd come aboard. I knew —— well what they wanted. The covering boat was well up and we shoved off in a hurry, believe me. Dropped in at Sou'west Bay and had a chin with the French priest. Knew he'd have the dope if any one did. Rama Village is 'going to make themselves strong.' Old Chief Maewo is on the blood-path. His son Mlembo went off last night in a war-canoe. You know what that means."

The crowd exchanged glances and nodded. New Hebrides savages are boasters. When a whole village is bored by everyday existence they are apt to be stricken by the publicity bug—a desire to be talked of enviously—and they let it be known that

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they intend to "make themselves strong," a process that includes the eating of human flesh. Their neighbors take warning; the women are guarded behind bullet-proof screens while they work on the crops and the village stockades are sentried night and day.

Emerson pressed forward.

"Rama, above Vatu Bay, on Malekula Island?" he asked the skipper.

"That's the spot. Maybe you've been there, doc. Maewo's a bad one. When we——"

But Emerson had turned abruptly on his heel and was stalking down the coral beach. Under the stilted roots of a pandanus clump a Tanna boy lay asleep in the sun, his mouth open, snoring lustily, naked save for a fiber belt and G string, a boar's tusk worn as a locket and the inevitable pigs' tails in the ragged lobes of his ears. Emerson stirred him with his foot.

"Where's Iseli?" he demanded.

The boy sprang up.

"Iseli, he stop along launch. Maybe that fellah he sleep."

"Swim out and wake him up. We're starting right away. Bring the launch to the landing. I'll be down in ten minutes."

The boy looked once at the western sky where the sun was close to the water. There was a wedding feast that night that he and Iseli—but the *matai-ni-mate* must be obeyed. He plunged into the calm lagoon and swam swiftly to the white, well-lined launch that was riding to a buoy and, clambering over its side with a down-kick of his lusty legs, he gleefully broke the day-dreams of Iseli.

Emerson strode on up-hill to the bungalow that he shared with his friend Deming, the naturalist. In five minutes he came out again with a canvas sack across his shoulder and made for the landing whence the gossiping crowd had departed with the men from the schooner to seek a place where speech could be eased by libations of squareface.

The launch slid north in the fast vanishing light. The lantern glowed under the hood where the doctor tended the engines, working as he might have worked over an operation and getting the last inch of the ten knots the boat was capable of making. Behind them a cloud glowed and softened from gold to crimson over the volcano on the summit of Tanna Island above the settlement of Lenakil, blotting out the early stars. It was sixty-five miles to Sou'west Bay on Malekula, twenty more to Vatu Bay below Maewo's village.

NO ONE knew, though many privately discussed, why Emerson, brilliant surgeon that he was, had buried himself at Lenakil. He was not attached to the hospital and with his close friend, Deming, he toured the group of islands in his launch with the two Tanna boys. His fame was great throughout the New Hebrides. He had treated many of the natives for gun-shot, arrow, spear and club wounds and it was supposed that they were grateful. Both he and Deming spoke their dialects perfectly and knew much of island customs. Emerson never went armed. He knew that a gun was considered a sign of suspicion or of hostile intent. He knew that when one was attacked it was from ambush and in the rear. Accordingly his custom showed wisdom as well as fearlessness.

Deming was a cheery man about the doctor's age, ruddy and sturdy, bald as an egg, with blue eyes that twinkled at every jest, kindly to all and close to Emerson as David was to Jonathan. Deming played the flute, preferring rollicking tunes and minor melodies with native *mekes* for variation. The sound would often come at nightfall from the veranda of the bungalow where the Tanna boys waited upon the two men worshipfully.

They had planned a trip to Malekula together that had been given up at the plea of the wounded native. Emerson never refused a case of that sort. So Deming had gone off alone in a sailing cutter with one boy. Emerson was to follow later in the launch. There had been no thought of danger. There had been no outrages at Malekula since the punitive expedition of French and British war-ships when the last village that had "made themselves strong," had been burned. The actual murderers had escaped into the mountain fastnesses, but the lesson had seemed sufficient.

Now Deming had gone to Vatu Bay to search the hills for a rare moth that had been reported there.

The New Hebrides lie in the shape of a Y with the island of Ambrym at the crotch, Malekula being next on the western fork. The great volcano on Ambrym was snorting

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intermittently as Emerson came abeam. There was a light low down on the shore, and in the moonlight he saw a small launch put out and make for his boat, its red and green lights showing as it came on, cutting out at an angle.

Emerson slowed up reluctantly as a man hailed in English. He placed the man—a small trader with a bad reputation for selling rifles and cartridges to the natives. He figured, however, that the man might have news, so he let the smaller boat come alongside and trail while the trader clung to a thwart.

"I've got a curio to sell ye, doc," said the man. "Somethin' ye've bin lookin' for. Where ye bound fer?"

"Malekula," answered Emerson curtly. "What do you know about this outbreak at Rama?"

The trader looked at him queerly, Emerson thought.

"I heard somethin' about it," he said. "Ain't got a drink with ye, have ye?"

"I never carry it," said Emerson. "You know that well enough. Tell me what you heard and set your price on this thing. I'm in a hurry. Where did you get it?"

The sight of money loosened the man's tongue; the bargain was completed and the information given. The trader loosened his hold and, as the faster launch slid ahead, spun his wheel and puffed back to his lonely station.

"No good that fella white man," ventured Iseli.

Emerson made no reply. He was digesting the news he had received from the trader and he never discussed white affairs with natives. He coaxed his engines with oil-can and waste, a frown on his face, while the two boys regarded him furtively, Iseli steering.

By and by Iseli tried again.

"One plenty large *motu* (canoe) he go along sta'bo'd," he announced.

Emerson lifted his head and glanced to where a black shape slid along in the lee of the tiny isle of Roto. He made no comment and Iseli, thoroughly snubbed, subsided.

Day was breaking when they made Vatu Bay. There was no sign of Deming's cutter. The broad beach of pounded coral sand was dazzling white, and the dense green wilderness of bush and forest sloped up to distant serrated peaks of cobalt. The engines were running smoothly. Emerson took the wheel and gently ran the launch on to the sloping beach.

"You two stay here in the bay," he said in native. "I shall come back presently with Mr. Deming—perhaps tonight—perhaps tomorrow. You wait here for three days. You've got water and food. Don't land. If you do I shall find out, and you will not work for me any more. Don't talk with any natives, whoever they are. Don't let a canoe come near you. Sheer off. Look after the engines. Don't monkey with them. Don't waste gasoline. If I don't come back the third morning from now, run down to Sou'west Bay and tell the missionary what has happened. Then go back to Lenakil. I'll give you the usual call when I come down from the bush. Only one of you sleep at a time. You understand?"

"Plenty we savvy," said Iseli, preferring his beach English.

Emerson stepped out of the boat and crunched up the beach, his sack over his shoulder. The Tanna boys watched until the bush swallowed him and then backed off into the bay.

THE rising sun produced only a half-light in the forest. Emerson made his way along the narrow trail, plunging down sliddery ravines and struggling up steep slopes. Great banyans and towering forest trees sent up their intermingling boughs, laced together by lianas, where purple flowers sent out a sickly scent and pale orchids swung. Wild taro shot up nine-foot stalks to leaves as large as tea-tables. He knew that at any moment he might tread upon the cunningly concealed point of a poisoned arrow made from a human shin, needle-sharp, unbarbed, smeared with brown rot. He trusted, however, that his stout shoes would break the brittle bone and pressed on, streaming with perspiration, toting his sack.

Once he emerged upon an upland plateau of whispering reed-grass where wild boars, seeking wild yams, went crashing, snorting by. He was close to Rama.

He held some hopes of Deming's life. First, Maewo, if he had made Deming prisoner—and Emerson held little doubt of that—might keep the *pièce-de-résistance* until his son's return. Next, Deming could talk, and to good purpose, along the lines

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of native understanding. Maewo Deming had never met, but Maewo knew Emerson and it was possible, if Deming laid emphasis on being the great friend of Emerson, that the latter's prestige might at least put off the tragedy.

Maewo knew the ultimate penalty and Rama was a well-built village that would take time and great labor to rebuild. Maewo and his tribe were more apt at laziness than labor. Lastly, if Deming played the part properly, they might be afraid of *netik*, of witchcraft, of what Deming's ghost might do to them. *Netik*, well used, was more powerful than a warship. Still he was afraid, knowing the irresistible appetites of aroused blood-lust. The fear of penalties would be diminished by present prospects. He kept on, weary but determined.

The trail doubled, trebled, quadrupled in a purposeful maze of passages hacked out from the mat of the jungle. The sound of idol-drums from huge tree-trunks carved with ghoulish faces, hollow-bellied, with slits in their sides to vent the noise, came to him, pounding in time to his pulse.

He came to a turn in the path and knew the village lay just beyond. The smooth, snaky bark of a great tree beside the trail was scarred with bullet-marks, fired at invaders, a spot whose range was absolutely known. There he halted and got out from his sack a native oboe. Emerson set his mouth to the orifice and sounded four high, piercing tones, the *matai-ni-mate;* Emerson's invariable signal, known to five-score villages on the islands. He repeated the signal three times, mopped his beaded forehead and waited patiently. Farther than this it was suicide to go in such a crisis without permission.

The drums boomed on. A parrot, green as emerald, settled on a bough of the bullet-scored tree and *crawked* at him. He had come seven miles through the steaming bush and it was nearly noon.

He waited an hour, his apprehension growing, conscious of unseen eyes peering at him, of unseen weapons pointed to forestall a false move, of savage forms gliding silently through the bush. It began to look ugly. Once more he blew the call, and again there was no response as the minutes ticked by in that place where there was no time. They were making him wait purposely, to humble him, to suit Maewo's sulky pleasure. At any second the chief's rage might break out at the presumption of the *matai-ni-mate's* presence. That his purpose was known, Emerson never doubted.

The afternoon passed, marked only by the booming of the devil-drums. The sun sank seaward. Down on the beach Emerson believed his Tanna boys were faithfully waiting, but he could not be sure. Nothing was certain on Malekula. They might have been trapped, or grown frightened and deserted with the launch.

Then a wild figure suddenly appeared, seeming to materialize from the shadows into a patch of late sunlight, grim, devilish, gloating. The savage had a head of hair unbleached by lime, glossy black, enormously fanned out, feathered with the green tail of a bird. His skull was shaped like a coconut; his cruel mouth appeared to spread from ear to ear with its blubber-lips. A pendant from the shell of the hawkbill-turtle waggled in the cartilage of his flat nose, his fox-eyes twinkled and shifted craftily. Turtle-shell cuffs, like the leather wristlets worn by cowboys, reached to his elbows, and his upper arms clinked with china trade bracelets. He wore a boar's tusk with a double twist, locketwise, and a necklet of dog's teeth. Human finger-bones made up his anklets. A sash of vividly green pandanus was about his belly and that was centered by a strip of crimson-dyed fiber. Shell earrings distended the lobes of his ears, and he looked like a demon cast in bronze as he stood grinning at Emerson. His face was blackened, save for white circles about his eyes, and a broad smear of trade washing blueing reached round the barrel of his chest.

"Maewo wants to know why you have come?" he asked.

"Maewo knows," said Emerson in native. "Why waste time in talk? It is nearly dark."

"Mlembo returns tonight," said the priest.

Emerson took no notice of the jibe.

"Where is my friend Deming?" he demanded.

"Maewo did not tell me."

"Why did not Maewo come himself? He says he is my friend."

"Maewo has a pain in his stomach. It is empty."

"It will be full of bitterness before long, if he is not careful," said Emerson steadily.

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"I have come for my friend. It will be very bad for Maewo, for Mlembo, for you, Ngoko, if he does not return with me."

"If he is able," said Ngoko with a provocative grin.

But Emerson was sure now that Deming was not dead. They would not have parleyed with him if that had been the case. They would have left him alone outside their walled city or shot him from ambush.

"Go back to Maewo and tell him that unless he sends me my friend I shall work magic."

"Is your magic proof against this?" mocked Ngoko.

He let out a grunting guttural. Instantly the bush bristled with fierce heads, painted black and red, with gleaming eyes and protruding weapons.

"Try it and see," said Emerson evenly. "Or take my message."

Steady Saxon eyes and shifty savage ones fought it out while Death waited on the twitch of a finger. The white man prevailed. Ngoko grunted again and the warriors vanished.

"Come to the *meke-meke* (sing-sing) ground," the priest said sullenly, then turned and went his way.

EMERSON followed with his sack into which he had put back the oboe. Rama was walled with coral stone in which bamboos sprouted and were plaited into a living screen. Back of the wall was a stout stockade, its posts carved into fetishes and strung with skulls. The gate that blocked a narrow opening had been set aside for Emerson's entrance, and he walked into a clearing. At the far end stood the tall gabled *hamal*, (club-house) half-walled in front, with steps leading to the top of the logs. No one was in sight. Ngoko had disappeared. The drums had stopped.

The silence was ominous but Emerson walked firmly across to the *meke-meke* ground where the great devil-drums stood grouped in the shade of a mighty banyan. The houses of bamboo and reed were set about at random, and the village stunk with garbage and sewage. To one side of the drums was a row of stones set up on end like tombstones, the cutting-blocks and sacrificial altars. The smooth skull-faces of the carven drums leered at him in the red rays of the lowering sun. Above each was poised a thing shaped like a bird or a bat, painted black. Opposite the altars was a line of low stone erections open in front and railed off like so many rabbit hutches. These were packed with skulls.

Emerson deliberately sat on one of them, took out his pipe and began to smoke as peacefully as if he had been on his own veranda at Lenakil listening to Deming's flute. Would he ever hear that music again, he wondered.

Then Ngoko came stalking back, his naked feet silent on the hard-packed dirt. He carried a calabash in one hand and a small object in the other. He walked with a strut that was deliberately impertinent.

"Maewo sends you these," he said and, waiting to see how the *matai-ni-nate* would take it, he had placed the calabash and the other object at the doctor's feet.

Emerson stared at them silently, showing no emotion, though his heart sank. The answer showed defiance, impudence, a threat!

The calabash held a vegetable not unlike tomatoes, of a deep red, nestling in leaves. They were the berries of the cannibal bush, the *Boro dina* (*Solanum anthropophagorum*). They held a faint, aromatic smell and a sinister significance. Prepared as sauce, they were reserved for the *kai-kai*, the feast of human flesh, designed to offset the indigestible effects of the horrible meal. Its leaves, dark, glossy green, were wrapped about the food to make it tender.

The other object was made of dark polished wood, its handle richly carved, a fork of five tines. Emerson knew its meaning. Human flesh is the only meat for which such a tool is used. It meant that Deming was doomed. It was the last word—an absolute insult. Emerson was unarmed, but Maewo feared his magic and he was an old friend. But Deming should not be given up. Emerson did not believe that they meant to let him return in safety. They would make themselves personally immune from the punishment that would follow, in any case, but Emerson's pleadings—for they fancied him vested with great power with the authorities—might make the punitive expedition more vengeful than usual.

Maewo liked to play the cat and mouse game. If he meant to kill Emerson he would torment his soul first before he disposed of his body.

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"Mlembo will be here soon," said Ngoko.

Emerson looked at him with a face like a mask.

"I think not," he answered. "I have something in return for Maewo's gift. Do you know this knife?"

Ngoko's face twitched and his eyes rolled as he looked at the blade that Emerson had taken from his sack. He started back frowning.

"It is the knife of Mlembo," he said.

Emerson nodded, turning it over in his hand. The hilt was intricately carven, set with little disks of pearl, bound with sennit. The blade had been hammered from a file and was double-edged, razor sharp, protected by a sheath of two pieces of bamboo bound together at intervals with fiber cord.

"Mlembo gave me this," said Emerson. "He tried to take prisoners at Roto and was repulsed. Mlembo was badly wounded. He is in the hospital at Lenakil, under my care. I should have been treating him but for this news. Now he must wait for my return—or it will be better for him if he should die."

He talked quietly, slipping the bright steel in and out of its sheath, watching Ngoko's face. It was stolid, but Emerson knew his news had struck home.

"He gave me this as a sign for Maewo," he went on. "Deming must come back with me or Mlembo will surely know despair. If I do not return they will operate on him according to my instructions. Then they will let him come back to Rama—alive.

"You know how the tribes have named the dokkotoris, *matai-ni-mate*, carpenters-of-death! Mlembo will come back alive but he will not see; he will not talk; he will not walk nor be able to hear nor do anything but be placed out in the sun and fed with a shell, like a child without teeth. The knives of the *matai-ni-mate* will do their work very thoroughly, Ngoko.

"Mlembo has breathed upon this blade and I have made magic. His soul is in the steel. Look!"

Emerson suddenly thrust the naked metal into the dark shadow of the banyan's roots, where it glowed with a lambent flame. Ngoko made a little clicking noise in his throat.

"It is bright now," went on Emerson, "For Mlembo makes a hard fight in spite of his wounds, and his strength is as the shining of this knife. But when it dims—watch well when it dims, Ngoko. Tell Maewo to watch well. The life of Mlembo will grow dull also; it will ebb as the tide from the beach, and, when there is no more flame upon the blade, then the soul of Mlembo will have passed into the uttermost darkness. Then shall my soul, if I have passed, and the soul of my friend Deming, if he passes, devise many things for the eternal torment and disgrace of the soul of Mlembo. It shall haunt your villages and make the hearts of Maewo, of you, Ngoko, and of all your people faint within you, so that the tribes shall make a mock of you and shall not kill you to eat because you are cowards, but shall make slaves of you. Your women shall be barren, your children die with the Chinese sickness (leprosy) and you shall be set apart. And when your souls go to the outer, uttermost blackness, they too shall suffer as the soul of Mlembo shall suffer.

"Or, if I live, I shall control the soul of Mlembo and make it do my bidding. It makes no difference whether I live or die, Ngoko. Mlembo is bound to me and I shall do all these things that I have spoken. Now, take this knife and go and tell Maewo!"

As Emerson withdrew the blade from the dense shade, it became less luminous in what was left of the twilight. Ngoko saw it and a tremor ran over his great body. He fearfully took the knife after Emerson had sheathed it. The doctor stood up.

"I shall wait outside the gate, Ngoko," he said. "See to it that I do not wait too long. I have spoken."

He turned his back on the cannibal, who stood glowering at him, and walked across the sing-sing ground to the stockade and so, through it, to the wall and down the trail to the tall tree where Ngoko had found him. He was conscious that every action was noted, even in the dusk, knowing that for the time he was safe by virtue of his magic. As for Deming, he did not know. The savage mind is hard to fathom. It twists like a reed in the wind. It depended a good deal, he thought, on how much *kawa* they had drunk. Too much might make them stupid or might make them murderous, regardless of consequences.

Darkness followed sunset as swiftly as an echo trails a shout flung against a mountain wall. Night closed in on the hill village with an emphasis that was the more marked

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by the sudden pricking of the light of great stars through the deep purple sky, where only a few minutes before rosy clouds had trailed across a background of turquoise green, like fluffy flamingo feathers blown before the wind. The noises of the forest ceased, save one, the *chir-chir-r-r-r-r* of the locusts.

No one came from the village, which remained wrapped in sulky silence. Emerson left the narrow trail and forced his way through the bush, with the aid of an electric torch, to a banyan, up which he clambered, edging out upon a long bough supported by root-pillars until he could look through the leaves down on the sing-sing ground. He made himself comfortable on the broad, flattened branch, groping for a little while within the sack that he had carried with him very carefully protected from too harsh contact with trunks and boughs. Then he waited for the moon to rise.

He knew that every one was within the stockade, in the club-house, discussing the latest turn to their "making themselves strong." It was a turn not to their liking. Emerson knew, even if they doubted or affected to doubt his news of Mlembo, that they would not look for the son of the chief to come in during the night when ghosts were abroad waiting along the trails to entangle souls. He knew that the fear of the *netik* of the *matai-ni-mate* was whispering in their hearts and that the gleaming knife was being inspected with awe, passed from hand to hand, from caste to caste, back to Ngoko again and then to Maewo. He had made his play. The next move must come from the chief.

AS THE moon rose it wove a web of black lace upon the silver floor of the sing-sing ground and presently, as if drawn by invisible hands, this filigree of light and shade retreated into the black caverns between the pillars of the banyan on the other side of the deserted place, opposite to Emerson's perch, leaving the clearing brilliant beneath the spot-light of the moon.

Sooner or later Emerson knew the village would come to the sing-sing grounds, where Ngoko, as head-priest, would thrash out the question. The New Hebridean native mind functions along a few deep lines, entirely physical save for the vague mental suggestions concerning witchcraft, a profession left in theory and practice to the experts, like Ngoko. Sex, stomach and their allies, dancing and fighting; all linked. These and sleeping make up the round of the cannibal male. The female does all the chores. Whenever the men get bored they either fight or dance.

The dance leads up with its barbaric rhythms, either to amorous orgies or the desire to kill. The priest conjures and invokes and plays the oracle with the dance, while the villagers hypnotize themselves by supplying the chorus with its timed movements and monotonous chanting. Now that the moon had lit the ground, Emerson was sure the performance would begin. There would be no feast because of the absence of Mlembo, the peril of Mlembo; therefore there would be a dance.

The devil-drums were grouped in a rough circle, and the moon lit the black things crouched upon the leering, long-featured faces that took up a full third of the hollow logs. The shadows of the drums made the interior of the circle obscure. Suddenly the great tympans began to boom, the sounds reverberating and rolling out in waves of vibrations shattered by the growth of the forest.

The drummers could not be seen. From the bush came a curious clicking noise, the beating together of hardwood sticks in unison. Then the clapping of unseen hands that kept time to a deep chanting, harmonious but oppressive, blending with drumbeat and handclap into something that seemed tangible, that seemed to Emerson to pound upon the nerve ganglions of his diaphragm and produce a strange excitation. What the effect would be on the savages, with their utter lack of introspection, he could readily surmise—a growing nervous tension that would find outlet along the avenue opened up by the suggestion of a priest or chief.

Out from the circle of the drums glided Ngoko. He had made an elaborate toilet. From brow to navel he was painted black and then spotted with dots of white. Loins and thighs were striped with white; from knees to ankles he was black again, with his feet entirely white. Save for necklaces of shell, bone and beads he was naked as a worm. His camouflage gave him an unreal, unsubstantial aspect as he skiddered over the ground with knees bent and outspread arms continually in motion,

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now fluttering like beating wings, now rigid like the pinions of a soaring bird as Ngoko seemed to hover and to pounce, his movements silent amid the bellow of the drums and the deep chanting of the men. On some signal or preconcerted pause, tympans and voices ceased and Ngoko fairly rattled as he made his short rushes and gliding retreats, his shadow weirdly following.

He began to jump up and down convulsively in the same spot, higher and higher, until it seemed impossible that anything human could sustain the effort. As he landed, he squatted, looking like a frog in his leprous daubing, and as he leaped he showed in his clutched right hand the knife of Mlembo. At last he began to spin in his leaps, to make whorls toward the drums, and there, where the shadow was black on the side of one of the logs and where the moon would not shine again that night, he sprang high and stabbed the blade into the wood, a good two inches imbedded, six more glowing in the darkness with a livid gleam of greenish blue. With breath he must have husbanded in his lungs for this last effort, Ngoko shouted:

"It shines. The soul of Mlembo shines! It shines with a strong light!"

Then he darted into the circle of the drums and vanished. He had made his point. He had answered, as he had been forced to answer for his own standing, the challenge of the *matai-ni-mate's* magic. The knife stuck where all could see its shining, ghostly blade. Ngoko had left it on the knees of his gods.

EMERSON slid down one of the pillars of his banyan branch with a tube he had taken from his sack and wedged this in a root-angle, carefully sighting until he had placed it to his satisfaction. A grim smile wreathed his lips as he noted that clouds were hurrying up from the sea. It would suit his plans if the moon was obscured, suit them much better if rain should fall. Rain meant the inevitable postponement of any feast, owing to the difficulty of preparing the bake-ovens, pits lined with red-hot stones.

From where he stood at the foot of the banyan he could no longer see the sing-sing ground, but he heard the thud of many feet between the drum-beats and the chanting—savage and wilder now. He knew that the natives were bounding, running at top speed, round and round the idols and the gleaming knife.

A few spatters of moonlight worked their way through to his feet and these suddenly disappeared, brushed out by the clouds. Emerson stooped, struck a wax vesta, applied the flame to the twisted blue paper that capped his angled tube and climbed back to his bough. The moon was hidden and the sing-sing grounds looked like a deep void in which circled yelling, invisible fiends. The illumined knife-blade shone like a cluster of glow-worms.

There was a little hiss beneath Emerson, a soft rushing, a gush of fire that quickly faded, and then a star-shell burst, slowly descending upon the sing-sing place, sinking with a flare that made the spot as bright as day. Under it showed the upturned, gaping faces of the dancers, their eyes rolling fearfully, their painted bodies palsied with terror, the hooked noses and sharks' mouths of the idols sardonic in the searching light that floated down from heaven. And as it burned and began to fade Emerson heard the patter of heavy raindrops on the banyan thatch above him.

Luck was with him. The falling star would be attributed to his magic, and the rain also taken as part of it. The downpour fell in tropical manner and within a few minutes, the packed earth of Rama village was ankle-deep with rushing water.

The savages, terror-stricken, their finery spoiled, their paint smeared and streaky, their feathers wilted and their fiery spirits quenched, rushed from the place to shelter. The star-shell died in the downpour and Emerson sat beneath the heavy thatch of leaves, through which the rain leaked only slightly, listening to the thud and swish of the sky-torrent on the solid dirt of Rama, trodden too firmly and too long to be easily turned into mud, and on the resilient leaves, and watching the light of the knife of Mlembo wink through the streaming water where it had been left sticking in the idol. Maewo had not appeared and Emerson shrewdly surmised that the monarch, drinking heavily to summon decision, had succumbed to the paralyzing *kawa*.

DAWN comes as swiftly as night in those latitudes. It was heralded by the moan of wind in the forest, by the crisp shuffle of leaves and fronds and the sighing protests of bending, chafing

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boughs. The rain had ceased and the air was filled with bush perfume. The stars turned from gold to silver and then seemed suddenly to dissolve in the red flush that rushed up from behind the peaks of Malekula. Birds twittered and squawked; a flock of parrots, green and red and purple, circled like a living rainbow across the sky to their feeding grounds. Then it was day.

Emerson, nodding on his bough, weary from vigil, slowly ate a cake of chocolate. The test had come. He could see the knife, still in the shadow, its luminosity wan in the strengthening light. If Deming did not appear within an hour, his case was hopeless. Mlembo's canoe was likely to arrive at any moment. Its paddlers might be even now climbing the mountain trail.

He descended wearily, clutching his bag. If he was defeated there was one thing he meant to do before he left or was butchered. This he prepared for as he squatted in the bush beside the trail, close to the bulleted tree.

His work occupied him less than fifteen minutes, and then he took station by the tree trunk, fixing the gaze of his sleepy, red-rimmed eyes upon the angle of the trail. Deep lines creased his face, seeming to grow more deeply graven as the minutes passed.

At last, when he had almost given up hope and had stooped for his sack, his unshaven jaws set and his eyes, no longer drowsy, burning with pale flame, a white man in very soiled and wrinkled ducks came round the bend of the path, his ruddy face ludicrous beneath an emerald banana leaf fastened with a strand of sennit. At sight of him Emerson gently set down the sack and with open arms ran half-way to meet him. For a minute the doctor held Deming in his arms while tears ran frankly down his cheeks.

"Just getting ready for a little reprisal, Tim," he said. "I had given you up. Figured that Maewo woke up with a sore head and wouldn't let you go. This is about the last tick we could have waited with safety. Mlembo may show any minute. Come on. Have you eaten? Do you want any chocolate?"

"Oh, they fed me. They took care of that. What's that about Mlembo? I overheard 'em say you had him in the hospital and would carve him up if they didn't let me go."

"Tell you about that later, Tim. Come on. We're not out of the bush yet. So far we've bluffed 'em, but it's too good to be true."

They pushed on at breakneck speed down the trail and came in view of the bay at last. Emerson gave a great sigh of relief. The launch was in the lagoon and there was nothing else in sight.

"We'll make it yet," said the doctor. "Top speed, Tim!"

They broke out on the beach exhausted. Emerson had to wait before he could summon breath to sound his oboe call. As he raised it to his lips, the two *kanakas* caught sight of the white-clad figures against the green of the bush and the launch came in. The doctor cocked his ear expertly and frowned.

"—— that Iseli!" he cried. "He's been fooling with the engine. Hear it miss? Tinkering with the carburetor most likely. Can't keep his monkey fingers off the works when they're in good shape. I left the engine running like a clock. All he had to do was oil and—come on, Tim."

The launch glided to meet them as they waded waist-deep, glad of the bath, and climbed aboard. Emerson went at once to his engines and Deming, less sensitive to the sound of faulty mechanism, took the wheel and steered for the open sea. The doctor came back to the stern.

"It may not be Iseli after all," he said. "I was afraid of water in the gas. Seems to be going better now."

They flushed a school of blue and silver flying-fish and both men reached for their pipes.

"Now, how did you get Maewo to let me go, Bob?"

Emerson talked shortly, between puffs.

"Simple enough, seeing it worked. First, I hoped you'd be alive after the skipper of the Manu-Levu brought word down to Lenakil that Maewo's village was on the rampage. I figured you'd stall 'em off and I figured that if they caught you they'd wait until Mlembo came back from looking out for lesser game. I fancy Mlembo called in at Rato, or close by, on a raid that didn't materialize. Think I spotted his canoe.

"Anyway, Mlembo was on his way south. I knew that. He landed on Ambrym after dark and roused out that scoundrel of a Peters. Swapped his knife

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and some other stuff of that kind for cartridges. Peters was still awake when he spotted my launch going north. Knew I'd probably buy the knife. I did because it was just what I needed, but I gave him a bit of my mind and I'll see to it that he sells no more rifles and ammunition to those devils.

"I fixed up the blade with luminous paint—a weak solution. Won't last until tonight but if I hadn't got you by then Mlembo would have come back and we'd both be in the ovens. I had to bluff and hope Mlembo wouldn't show. It was a —— of a night. But, what with the knife and the *matai-ni-mate* talk and a star bomb, the play went. It was about even odds on Mlembo showing, even odds whether they believed me. My magic against theirs. With daylight the blade began to pale, naturally, and they lost their nerve.

"If you hadn't come out I was going to start a little firework display before they finally got me from the bush. I had a dozen sticks of dynamite in my sack, cut in half. I capped 'em and fused 'em while I was waiting for you to show up. They'd have known in Rama that I was around. Your turn."

"It was the flute saved me at first; then my trick with the dialect and the mention of your name as my big friend. I suppose, too, they held me for Mlembo's return as a *pièce-de-résistance.* They got my cutter boy and made meat of him. I owe them something for that. I had caught the moth I was after and was sitting on a log fluting away, never thinking of trouble, when I looked up to see a crowd of them all round me, listening like wild brutes to Pan. The music didn't charm them long. Point of fact, I quit. They took me along, trussed me and shoved me in the *hamal.* But I——"

THE perverse engine began to falter again. Emerson went under the hood and worked, but he did not seem able to locate the trouble. They still moved at a fair rate but the even *putter-putter* was now jerky and uncertain. The doctor poked out his head to hail Iseli, squatted on his haunches on top of the forward cover.

"You Iseli," snapped Emerson irritably; "what made you fool along this engine?"

He cut short the native's voluble protest, trying to get out of him just what experiment he had made. But, lacking sufficient patience, he was too crisp, and Iseli sulked, mute.

"Might be ignition," muttered the doctor, going over the machinery, which began going fast from bad to worse. With a final *p-f-sss-tt* it died, nor could the sweating Emerson coax it back to life again.

As they floated, slowly borne by an offshore current that fought the flood, a weird clamor broke out from the land. It sounded like the baying of a pack of giant dogs. It was the sound of great conch shells being blown. At the sound Iseli knelt and then stood upright, gazing seaward. Emerson came out from under the hood with a pair of binoculars.

"One big-fellow canoe he come," said Iseli and his face was gray with fear.

Emerson looked where he pointed, while the triumphant baying roared out from the bush by Rama. Into the focus swam a great canoe, high-prowed and high-pooped, coming on fast. Now, backing the conches, came the boom of drums, tapping out a message in cannibal Morse, sounding far to sea.

Deming looked towards Emerson.

"Mlembo?" he asked.

The doctor nodded grimly.

"If I can't get this going inside of ten minutes, the jig's up," he said. "Mlembo will pot us at long range with the rifles and cartridges that dog of a Peters has let him have from time to time. And Peters calls himself a white man!"

He handed over the glasses to his friend and began overhauling his engine feverishly. The message to Mlembo had been a superfluous flourish. The sight of a white man's boat in trouble was a certain call to arms and bloodshed. Mlembo would be cautious, fearing a trap, but, once he was sure of the whites being in difficulties, he would do his best towards helping to "make his village strong."

Deming put down the glasses. They only accentuated unpleasant details. They showed the mother-of-pearl insets in the gunwales and prow, the carvings, the fluttering feathers that spoke of head-hunting, the double row of paddlers—two score in all—sending the big canoe surging along on the top of the flood. One giant figure stood in the stern, urging his men—Mlembo.

Deming saw the glint of weapons and

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knew that, aside from spears and bows and arrows, the last poisoned with corroded human flesh, there were several trade rifles, big-bored guns that shot large lumps of lead. Deming had heard Emerson describe the sort of wounds they made—not that that mattered. It would be good fortune if they were killed by a shot. If Emerson couldn't locate that engine trouble. . . .

A clicking broke Deming's string of thoughts. The two native boys were shivering in the hot sun, their teeth chattering like castanets.

"What name," moaned Iseli. "What name the *matai-ni-mate* no carry rifle? All same Mlembo. What name?"

His fellow was gibbering in native.

Emerson stuck out an anxious face.

"Bad gas or ignition, Tim. How close are they?"

A bullet that hummed overhead answered the question. The two boys cowered in the bottom of the cockpit.

"Pretty close, Bob. They've got us, I guess."

A second shot splintered the planks.

"Got us nothing," roared the doctor, regardless of grammer. "We'll coax 'em in a bit. Got to risk a shot or they'll plug us in the gasoline tank."

He stood up. The canoe, its paddlers alert, rested on the water five hundred yards away. Mlembo stood in the stern with his rifle. Three or four others had their guns ready to aim, but for the present Mlembo was doing all the shooting. His rifle barked and Emerson flung up his arms and collapsed.

Deming's face went ashy under its ruddy tan. He still wore the green banana leaf tied over his bald head and he was grotesque as he threw himself beside his friend, his eyes wide with horror and sudden grief.

"Where did they get you, Bob? Bob, old man, I——"

"I'm all right. Bluff number two. Got to get 'em in dynamite range. Jump up, Tim, and shake your fist at 'em; then take a tumble yourself."

BUOYANT with swift relief, Deming poised himself. The canoe was creeping closer. Four men blazed away at him, naked but for wide cartridge-belts of bark, their bodies painted black and scarlet. Mlembo was reloading. With dramatic effect Deming twisted about and fell, clutching at the gunwale, letting one hand waggle feebly after he dropped. Then he let this flop inboard.

Emerson had opened his bag and taken out the half-sticks of dynamite.

"Twenty-four bombs, Tim," he said. "Break these matches in half and stick 'em in the fuses so they'll light quick. I ought to keep at that engine. This isn't going to be all on our side. Can you throw straight?"

Deming looked at Emerson with crinkled eyes.

"I pitched for Williams in 1890," he said. "I may be rusty, Bob, but I haven't forgotten how."

"Good man! Keep your eye glued to the port. Let 'em get close enough to hurl 'em clean into the canoe. Keep throwing. If the fuse hits the water it's all off. They'll last while you can count three slowly."

"You attend to your engine, Bob," said Deming, arranging himself and his bombs close to a port-glass. "I'm doing the pitching in this inning."

Emerson looked at his friend with an affectionate quirk to his mouth. Deming was less excited on the surface than when he pitched for Williams College. His lips were compressed and there were little bunches of muscles all along his set jaws.

The launch drifted and the paddlers in the war canoe, with *hi-yahs* and a gabble of excited yells, dipped their blades softly, so as gradually to bring the two craft closer. Mlembo and his riflemen shot two volleys that punctured the side of the launch, one bullet grooving the shoulder of Iseli, who sprang up like a jumping-jack with a fearful yell of fear, displaying his bloodied body, and was then tripped by Deming to a realistic death-fall. A roar came from the canoe.

Deming feared they would turn the launch into a colander with the plug bullets, but they ceased firing. Cartridges were always scarce, despite the Peters of the Beach. Mlembo fired the last shot. The missile flattened on the fly-wheel within a foot of Emerson's head. Then the young chief, satisfied that his triumph only needed the gathering in, gave the word and the paddles plunged deep and hard, foam steaking along the big outrigger as it furrowed the sea.

When they were a hundred feet away

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Deming lit a cheroot that Emerson had given him and puffed on it till it glowed. At seventy feet he took a half stick in his right hand, the cigar in the fingers of his left. He set the match head in the fire and it blazed and sputtered, the fuse burning briskly. Deming stood upright.

"We'll forget the wind-up," he murmured and hurled the explosive.

Even Mlembo had laid down his rifle. He saw the hissing thing and yelled a warning. A warrior smashed at it with his blade and hit it fairly.

The explosion rocked the launch. When the bright glare had winked and vanished, but before the roar had died, Deming, throwing his second bomb, saw a gap in the canoe and a huddle of bloody flesh. The canoe had on way enough swiftly to close the gap between them, and in the sudden terror the paddlers were in confusion, some paddling on, the rest backing. Deming threw his dynamite with unerring aim. The fifth one broke the great canoe fairly in half and it settled swiftly, its warriors spilled into the sea, a quarter of them mutilated too badly to swim.

Then a fresh danger threatened. They swam fast and some had saved their weapons before they sank. Most of them clung to the wreckage and the outrigger, but others made for the launch. Deming was forced to pick his marks. Spears began to fly past him and one grazed his cheek. Mlembo, swimming chest-high, dived at the bomb Deming flung at him. He came up stunned, rolling over with open mouth, and sank. A giant gained the gunwale. Others were clutching at the sides of the launch. They had got in under Deming's guard. He dared not use his dynamite at such close quarters.

He grabbed a heavy wrench and smashed down on the skull of the nearest. The steel sank into the bone and the warrior slumped. Deming kicked at Iseli and the other boy, yelling to them to take the boat-hooks for pikes.

Then there came a *put-put-puttera-put* from under the hood, and the launch gathered speed as Emerson came leaping aft, flung in the clutch, took a hitch round the wheel, cleated it and with a second wrench battered off the would-be boarders.

Then the allies came. One fin, then six—a dozen—a score! Sharks on the trail of blood, gliding to the feast.

"WHAT about your surgeon's ethics, Bob?" asked Deming an hour later. "If you really had a native, as you bluffed you had Mlembo, would you play the rôle of Carpenter-to-Death?"

"Ethics?" snorted Emerson. "Ethics be —— I wouldn't give your little finger nail for the whole native population of the Hebrides. I'd cheerfully carve up any number of 'em, body and soul, if that were possible, to avenge you. Friendship is a blamed sight scarcer than ethics, Tim. By the way, did you get your moth?"

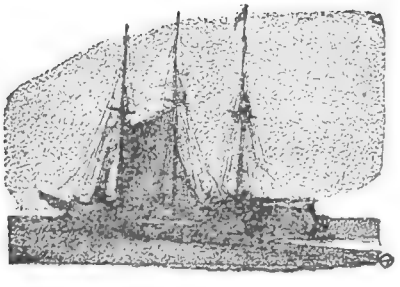
"Hang me, if I didn't clean forget it," exclaimed Deming with a look of apprehension as he displaced the banana bonnet he had tied so securely, and looked into the curved interior of the great leaf.

"Ha!"

He shouted triumphantly as he displayed a fluffy mass of cotton and, dividing it carefully, showed the capture, a moth with wings that were shimmeringly opalescent, fully fifteen inches in spread and ten wide.

"Look at that beauty! Name it, Tim."

"That's easy," answered Emerson. "Call it *Latebraria*—or whatever its generic name is—*Latebraria Williamsoniensis*.



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Lynch Lawyers

A Five-Part Story
Conclusion

by WILLIAM PATTERSON WHITE

Author of "High Pockets," "Hidden Trails," etc.

CHAPTER XXX

THE UNEXPECTED

IN BRADLEY USHER'S back room Red Kane turned from his contemplation of the curious stain on the horsehide desk-cover and spoke concerning cartridges:

"Take one o' my boxes, Tom," said he. "You got more loops 'n I have."

"You gents want your first month in advance?" asked Mr. Usher.

"We're willin' to wait," said Red shortly. "We ain't spent all o' that money we got for our ranch yet."

"I see," Mr. Usher nodded. "I forgot about that ranch you—sold. Ain't you fellers kind o' trustin'?"

"How?"

"Folks workin' for me usually want their wages ahead."

"Yeah? Well, I guess maybe we ain't scared o' losin' nothin'. Yuh see, we generally make out to collect whatever's owin' us no matter who owes us." Thus Red Kane with a wink and a leer.

Mr. Usher cackled a laugh—without merriment, as was his custom.

"Yo're funny," he averred. "Both o' yuh are funny. Djever stop to think they's such a thing as gettin' too funny?"

"No, we never did," Red said frankly. "An' you'll notice," he added thoughtfully, "we're still alive."

"'Still' ain't 'always'," was the sapient observation of Mr. Usher.

" 'Here endeth the first lesson,' " drawled Red. "A hymn comes next as a rule, or will some gent lead in prayer?"

His eyes, wide, innocent, demure, searched the deadly glare of the baited Mr. Usher. It was manifest that the money-lender's patience was teetering on the razor-edge of a break.

Red was ready. So was Tom. The former was positive that he could put two derringer bullets where they would do the most good before Mr. Usher could reach under his coat. Tom pinned his faith to the six-shooter whose barrel nuzzled his hip-bone.

Mr. Usher's self-control continued to teeter on the edge of a break. Oh, very near his death was Mr. Usher. Mr. Usher smiled. The Great Reaper sighed, shouldered his scythe and passed on regretfully. It seemed to him that Mr. Bradley Usher had been ripe for harvest a long time.

Mr. Usher's smile widened to a cheerless grin. With difficulty he repressed the impulse to shiver. Odd that he should experience a chill on a warm and sultry morning.

"——!" exclaimed Mr. Usher. "I like you two. ——fino why, but I do."

The brothers' steady gaze contained no warmth. They were as pleased as if a rattlesnake had suddenly become affectionate.

"Yeah?" said Red Kane. "Don't strain yoreself."

"I won't. Now, I'm takin' a li'l' trip. I may not be back for ten days or a couple o' weeks. If you want anythin', money or the like o' that, ask the hotel landlord, Skinner. He'll be in charge here while I'm

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away. An' when I come back I hope they'll be a couple o' two-legged calves the less in Flipup."

"They'll be less all right," Red laughed harshly. "They'll be considerable less. You can stick a pin in that."

"WE'LL give him two days' start, an' that's a plenty," muttered Red to his brother as they watched Mr. Usher ease his long body into the stage in front of the express office.

"You bet," was Tom's endorsement. "Do we eat or don't we?"

Heartily refreshed by a pound or two of boot heel steak, greasy fried potatoes and pints of strong coffee, they repaired to the shady side of the hotel for the purpose of thoroughly cleaning their firearms.

The weapons did not require more than the flick of a rag, but it was needful to hold speech with Skinner. Red knew the man would join them. He did—within the hour.

"Want some machine-oil, gents?" he asked affably, standing before them, his hands in his pockets.

"What we got's good enough, thank yuh most to death," replied Red, taking some of the curse from his sarcasm with a cheerful grin. "Ain't you through with that rawhide, Tom? You'll wear out the riflin' if y'ain't careful."

"I'll get yuh another string," offered Skinner, jingling the coins in his pockets.

"Nemmine no string," said Red. "He's through with it now. I see," he added in a drawl as he stuck a piece of white paper in the open breech of his rifle and squinted down the bore, "I see yore memory's improved."

Skinner leaned against the wall and tried to look wise.

"Meanin' how?" he queried.

"How? Why— That riflin' ain't pitted, is it? Naw, s'oil, thassall. Lordy, I thought for once I was out o' luck. Meanin'— Huh? What was that you said, mister?"

"I said meanin' how?"

"How? Oh, yeah, yore memory, shore. Thasit. Ain't a feller's memory a odd number? Yuh'll forget an' forget, an' then all of a sudden yuh'll remember everythin' plain as the brand on a hoss."

"Plainer'n some brands," hinted Skinner with a fatuous wink.

"You keep away from that corral," directed Red gravely. "You might strain yore eyes lookin' too close at—things."

"I expect. But—maybe I didn't look at—things. Maybe somebody told me."

"Which is all a heap possible—a heap possible. But we was talkin o' memories, wasn't we? My memory's sort o' like yores was, 'cause I can't remember straight through yet. I got the start of it."

He began to hum "John Peel" in slow time and try with a knife-blade the screws in his rifle-butt.

"Start o' what?" prompted the inquisitive Skinner.

"O' what? Oh, yeah, I mean I'm beginnin'—we're beginnin'—to get the notion we seen that long feller some'ers, too. We ain't neither of us shore—yet."

"Long feller."

Skinner endeavored to exchange his wise expression for one of penetrating sharpness.

"Shore—our friend, yores an' mine. The one who was shot at this mornin'. Two hundred yards range an' couldn't nick him. Ragged work, ragged work."

"It was half a mile," corrected Skinner. "If they'd gone where I told 'em to——"

He spat disgustedly.

"Then you wasn't in the li'l' party," drawled Red, vigorously rubbing the rag over his magazine and barrel.

"——, no." Thus Skinner with great vehemence. "If I'd been there, they wouldn't 'a' come back to dinner, neither o' 'em. Will they be here for supper, I wonder?"

"Maybe; then again, maybe not. Yuh can't never tell in this country. But you can put down a bet yuh won't need to board 'em always."

"I guess not," nodded Skinner.

"Where was it you seen that feller?" inquired Red, ceasing to beat about the bush.

"Up in Slingtown once. He was trailin' a rustler. He got him."

"Association detective like you said, huh?"

"He was off an' on whenever any big job come up."

"I'm rememberin' a li'l' better. When Tom an' me knowed him, seems to me he worked for the Gov'ment. How about it, Tom?"

"Yep," grunted Tom. "You hit it."

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"Maybe he's workin' for them now," suggested Red.

"Nah," denied Skinner. "He's after—" The landlord caught himself. "What was his name when you knowed him?" he continued in an altered tone.

"I didn't know him. Never think it, an' I can't remember his name neither. But you do."

"Shore."

"What was it? Lordy, man—" as the landlord still hesitated—"ain't we all li'l' friends together? Whatcha hangin' back in the breechin' for?"

"I dunno how much you know," was the cryptic reply.

"You can take it we know all we need to know," said Red severely. "Lookit, Skinner, wasn't his name Durham, or somethin'?"

"His name's Derr, Bill Derr," shortly.

"Well, if he's after Brad Usher," drawled Red, looking at the landlord from beneath his eyebrows, "what'd he let Brad slide off in the stage for?"

"He ain't after Brad," promptly denied Skinner. "What makes yuh think that? Say, you want too much information, you do."

"Lookit, feller," said Red, his drawl drawlier than ever, "if I'm a-doin' anythin' you don't like, why—I'm here an' yo're here. What's fairer than that?"

"I didn't mean nothin'," grumbled the landlord, "but—but I ain't got no orders to talk."

The landlord wrapped himself in his tattered dignity and withdrew round the corner of the house. Soon they heard him wrangling with the cook.

"Skinner knows, bless his honest li'l' heart," whispered Red out of one corner of his mouth. "But they's no gettin' anythin' out o' Skinner now. Maybe later ——"

He did not finish the sentence. It wasn't necessary.

RED and his brother spent the remainder of the afternoon in gun-cleaning and saddlery-overhaul. Two or three times they were conscious of Skinner's peering at them from neighboring points of vantage. From five o'clock till supper-time, Skinner, seated across the street, kept them under close observation. Derr and Kinzie were loafing in front of the hotel and were included in the scope of Mr. Skinner's vision. It was obvious that Skinner had something on his mind.

After supper, when dusk was merging with night, Red missed his pocket-knife. Believing he had left it in the dining-room, he reentered the hotel. It was pitch dark in the dining-room. Standing in the doorway, he struck a match. At first his dazzled eyes did not perceive that the room had an occupant. Then, as he cupped a protecting hand round the match and advanced toward the table, he saw the landlord across the room. Skinner stood in front of one of the windows and faced him silently. Skinner's legs were spread wide; his arms were akimbo. He looked annoyed.

"I don't see whatcha hadda come bustin' in thisaway for," he grumbled.

"Whyfor not?" countered the mildly surprized Red. "What's it to you, I'd like— Say, is that a rifle stickin' across the window-sill?"

He saw that it was a rifle just as the match went out. He did not scratch another. One hand on the butt of his six-shooter, he slid round the table and approached the silhouette blotting the gray rectangle of the window.

"What's the game?" he demanded in a whisper. "What is this anyway?"

"Whadda yuh s'pose?" was the husky rejoinder. "You got yore orders an' I got mine."

Red was beside Skinner. He looked past him through the window. There, not forty feet distant, standing on the sidewalk in the full glare of the light from a saloon window, was Bert Kinzie.

"I'd 'a' got him if you hadn't come ringin' in an' lit matches all over the place," complained Skinner. "Now he's gonna move. Told yuh so."

"That feller was one-half of our job," whispered Red. "What you gotta horn in for?"

"I got my orders. I know what I'm doin'. All you need to know is yore job would 'a' been half done if you'd stayed out o' this dinin'-room."

"Yeah?" drawled Red, holding his rapidly rising temper with both hands and sitting down upon it hard. "Yeah? Brad Usher don't leave nothin' to chance, does he?"

"He don't."

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"I should say not. They's nothin' like goin' the whole hawg while yo're at it. But don't fret, old-timer, we're plenty able to do our job up proper, an' they ain't no need for you to risk yore valuable life a-bushwackin' folks promiscuous. As I was sayin', Skinner, we need a li'l' advance, Tom an' me. How about it?"

"As you was sayin'! Y'ain't said nothin' about it before. Whatcha come in here for, huh?"

"I was in to look for my knife, which same has hopped out o' my pants pocket. But nemmine the knife. Don't worry none about it. I'd just as soon have the money."

"I s'pose you would. How much yuh want? Don't be too proud. I only got forty-three wheels in the till."

"Lordy, man, what good's chicken-feed to us? We need eighty apiece."

"Eighty apiece!"

"Gotta have it! So yuh might's well shut up. If you ain't got a hundred'n' sixty in the till, Brad Usher's got it in his safe, an' don't try to tell me different. We'll go with yuh, Tom an' me, while yuh get it. He's out in the street some'ers. We'll pick him up on the way. C'mon!"

Five minutes later Skinner, kneeling in front of the safe in Mr. Usher's office and working the combination, heard a most uncanny sound at his back. Which sound was caused by the sliding home of the huge bolt on the door. Skinner's fingers froze to the dial. He was sufficiently experienced not to turn round.

"Go'n," ordered Red.

"Don't stop," supplemented Tom. "Never mind us a-tall."

"Don't start to yell neither," amplified Red. "I'm sayin' 'start,' y'understand, 'cause you won't never finish that yell—leastways not in this world."

Skinner sagged back on his heels.

"I forget the combination," he said sullenly.

"Yo're a liar," declared Red. "Don't contradict me. Yo're a liar by the clock. I can see it in the back o' yore head. Tom, I do believe we gotta be rough with this jigger."

"'S a shame," said Tom.

"She is, you bet. While yo're figgerin' out what happens to liars, Skinner, s'pose you tell us somethin'. Why is Bill Derr here in Flipup?"

Mr. Skinner clamped his plump jaws.

"Tom," continued Red in his gentlest tone, "would you mind seein' if them shutters is good an' tight—no cracks in 'em anywheres? While yo're doin' that, I'll collect the six-shooter in Skinner's hip-pocket. That's shore one bad place to pack a gun, feller. Unhandy, yeah. Just stay right where y'are, Skinner. I know. You was thinkin' o' movin' the lamp, wasn't yuh? I'll move it for yuh, see, where yuh won't be able to reach it before I can reach you."

Red laughed at his own grim pleasantry. So did not Skinner. He drew his wretched brows together. What might portend, he could not guess. But there was a most sinister threat in Red's calm manner. And he, Skinner, had walked into the trap with eyes wide open. That was what galled.

"Who is Bill Derr after?" pursued the patient Red.

"I ain't none shore," equivocated Skinner.

"Now that's tough," mourned Red, his right hand flicking out like the head of a striking snake. *Smack!* Skinner promptly smote the floor with cheek-bone, nose and shoulder. He sat up and fingered a tingling ear.

"You see," Red said brightly, "I only used the heel o' my hand on yuh. If I ever hit you right, yore second cousins will feel the shock. You lousy pup," he went on, mindful of the wrongs suffered by the Lentons at the hands of Usher and his adherents, "you'd oughta be lynched, an' I guess you will be. Whadda you think? Ain't sayin' nothin', huh? Tha's bad. Tom, you got the sharpest skinnin'-knife. Lend her to me a shake."

At which dismal words Skinner's dishonest heart skipped several beats.

"He's gotta be gagged first," said Tom.

"Shore. He'll yell his head off if he ain't. Use his own bandanna, I would."

AT TOM'S approach Skinner braced back against the safe and flung out protesting hands.

"Gents, gents!" he cried. "Whatcha gonna do to me?"

"Hog-tie yuh, gag yuh, lay yuh out on the floor," was Red's reply. "When yo're all so flat and fancy, I'm gonna take this skinnin'-knife—" Red held up the long-bladed weapon and turned it slowly in the rays of the lamp—"an' stick the point under yore finger nails, one finger nail at a time,

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y'understand, an' a li'l' bit at a time. Djever run a splinter under yore finger nail, Skinner?"

"If yo're thinkin' of yellin' for help," nipped in Tom quickly, reading a half-formed purpose on Skinner's face, "remember what my brother said about yore yellin'. I'm sayin' the same. We always agree. You'd be surprized how agreeable him an' me always are."

"Yuh—yuh wouldn't torture me, gents!" wailed the properly horrified Skinner.

"No we wouldn't. We wouldn't think o' such a thing. Only Injuns torture folks. We're white. So we're only argyin' with an' persuadin' of you, Mr. Skinner. See the difference?"

Skinner's complexion was turned a blotchy saffron-yellow. His eyes, ever slightly protuberant, were fairly popping with the fear that oppressed his soul.

"How about it, feller? Hog-tie or squeak?" demanded Tom, his hands on the knot of Skinner's neckerchief.

"Whatcha wanna know?" sullenly resigned.

"Ain't Bill Derr down here after the murderer of Dick Lenton?" snapped out Red, who had from the very beginning clearly perceived how he could make capital out of Derr's arrival.

"I—guess—maybe."

"You know it," drove home Red. "Brad Usher told yuh."

Skinner's frightened eyes admitted as much.

"Who is the killer?" prompted Tom Kane.

Came a knocking at the door, and Skinner's tongue at once stuck to his teeth.

"Skinner," whispered Red, "Tom's gonna open the door. Whoever comes in, you talk to 'em like nothin' had happened. I'll set right here with my left hand behind the wing o' my chaps. They'll be a derringer in my hand, Skinner, a li'l' ol' derringer with two barrels. Count 'em, two, so yuh see I ain't deceivin' yuh. Don't give no warnin's, Skinner. No winks, nods or nothin', an' don't try to leave the room. Sidown on the table there an' swing yore feet like yuh hand't nothin' on yore mind but yore hair. Thas'it. Sit up, you hunk o' fat. Git some back-bone in yore spine."

Tom drew back the long bolt, turned the knob and opened the door. Entered then, walking with feline grace on the balls of his small feet, Mr. Hollister.

"Howdy," said Red, not failing to observe that there was more than a dash of the furtive in Mr. Hollister's manner.

"Evenin'," returned Hollister, staring unblinkingly at Red.

The latter, secure in the knowledge that several weeks' growth of whiskers obscured the features of himself and brother, nodded pleasantly.

"Take a chair," he suggested. "Make yourself at home."

"I always do," was the flip acceptance. "Where's Brad, Skinner?"

"Takin' a trip," Red answered for Skinner.

"I was speakin' to Skinner." Thus Hollister, rebukingly.

"They's no law against that as I know of. Hop to it."

"Whatcha boltin' the door for?" Hollister demanded, turning to Tom.

"We ain't exactly anxious for visitors."

Hollister's wide mouth stretched into a smile. It might be said that he beamed.

"Why didn'tcha say so at first?" he asked. "How'd I know you was all right?"

He perched himself on the extreme edge of a chair, pushed back his hat, pulled a blue-silk handkerchief from the breast pocket of his flannel shirt and mopped his hot forehead.

"Yuh dropped somethin'," said Red, for, coincident with the drawing out of the handkerchief, a small, hard object had shot across the intervening space and plunked down on his lap.

He picked up that which had fallen and tossed it back to Hollister, but not before his eyes had glimpsed it fairly. It was the wood-carving of an Indian girl's head, almost a replica of the head Bill Derr carried for a pocket-piece—a smaller edition of the one beside the letter-file on the desk of Mr. Usher.

"That's one clever li'l' carvin'," was Red's comment. "Djuh do it yoreself?"

"No," Hollister denied carelessly, dropping the head into a vest-pocket. "I ain't so handy with a knife."

"I wonder," said Red softly. "Is yore hair really yaller?"

Hollister, despite the menace he read in the other's tone, did not snatch at his gun. For a ring of cold metal was resting cosily against the back of his neck. Tom Kane had come alive.

"Yuh see," drawled Red, "I had a look at

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you once in Farewell an' yore hair was right yaller. Tonight, even by the light of the lamp, she's sort o' black at the roots. Brad Usher's got some stuff in a bottle that turns a red-chestnut hide yaller. Might it turn black hair yaller, huh? An', workin' on from that, might you be comin' here tonight for a bottle o' that stuff? I wonder, feller, I wonder."

"Whatcha ravin' about?" snarled Hollister. "Yo're crazy—crazy as bats! Whatsa matter with yuh? Whatcha holdin' me up thisaway for?"

"For luck," Red replied placidly. "Might yore name be John Hudson, by any chance?"

"It might—only it ain't."

"Ain't it? We'll see. Keep yore paws up! Tom's only takin' yore gun away, thassall. Yo're shore yore name ain't John Hudson, feller? Aw right. If you ain't John Hudson, they ain't a knife-scar on yore right arm half-way between yore shoulder an' yore elbow. Tom, would you mind rollin' up the gent's sleeve?"

On the instant Hollister ducked and half-wheeled. In the neighborhood of his belt-buckle a derringer crashed and spat with a burst of orange flame. Burning powder-grains dotted Red's forehead and a hot breath singed his skin. Red's hammer clicked even as Tom smashed Hollister across the head with the barrel of his gun.

Hollister bent backward and dropped in a heap. He lay without motion, a thin trickle of blood staining the floor-boards beneath his head.

"Misfire," said Red, calmly snapping open the loading-gate of his six-shooter. "First I ever had."

"Lucky she wasn't yore last."

"Is that so? Yo're a fine side-kicker, you are! Yo're supposed to take away his artillery, an' he hides out a derringer on yuh an' fills my face full o' powder an' misses my nose by the thickness of a thin dime. An' all you gotta say is, 'yo're lucky.' 'Yo're lucky,' huh? Say——"

"Aw, you ain't hurt, you bellerin' calf. What's a li'l' scorchin'? You make me sick. I can't always remember everythin'—Where's Skinner? Say, where is he? Who's a fine partner now? I'm askin' yuh, who is? You was supposed to look after Skinner, wasn't yuh? An' didja? Didja? Yuh did not! He slides out from under yore eyes like yuh was blind. First that Art Teller, an' now Skinner."

The smarting Red slipped in another cartridge and dashed into the pitch-blackness of the warehouse. He had not taken six steps when he tripped on a case of canned tomatoes and fell head-first into a collection of buckboard and wagon wheels. He scrambled to his feet with a barked shin and skinned features and had the extreme dissatisfaction of hearing the door at the other end of the warehouse creak open and slam shut. Mr. Skinner had made good his departure.

Red returned to the office. His brother was kneeling beside the prostrate and still senseless Hollister. The latter's right sleeve was rolled up almost to the shoulder seam.

"Don't tell me he got away on yuh!" Tom sneered savagely. "What didja hit with yore face—the floor? An' yuh needn't explain neither if yuh gotta yell thisaway. I ain't deef. Lookit this jigger's arm. They's that scar."

Red explored the pockets of Hollister's vest. From the second pocket he drew an expensive hunting-case gold watch. Red clicked open the case. On the reverse side were several lines of engraving setting forth that the inhabitants of Piegan City presented the watch to the governor of the Territory as a token of their affection and esteem.

"Which this sort o' tangles Hollister in the road-agent business," nodded Red, dangling the watch. "I wish he'd 'a' waited another minute before knockin'," he added dolefully. "Skinner was just gonna gimme the name o' that murderer."

"They's no use o' chasin' Skinner now," declared Tom, "an' yuh might as well go tell Bill Derr we got one of his road-agents."

"I guess I might," said Red heavily. "Stick Hollister's Injun head in yore pocket an' get the other off Usher's desk while I'm gone, will yuh, Tom?"

"I DUNNO when I been so pleasantly surprized in all my life," said Bill Derr, looking down at the now gagged and glaring prisoner. "You'd oughta stuck to yore rustlin', John. Playin' two hands to once ain't poker. Red, are you shore nobody heard that derringer?"

"If they did, they didn't come a-hornin' in to find out. Why?"

"'Cause I wanna get this Hollister-Hudson out o' this. He ain't all we're lookin' for, but he's somethin', an' whatsa sense o'

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waitin' three-four weeks for extradition papers when she's only thirty miles to the State line?"

"Which that's the brightest thought you ever had," said Red. "You'll need an extra hoss. They's my black all ready a'waitin'. You'n' Bert stick here, Bill, while me'n Tom do the needful. They's no sense in either of yuh fussin' round the corral or the hotel either. Warbags in yore room, huh? Aw right, we'll get 'em. Take yore hands out o' yore pockets. She ain't necessary to pay the landlord. Because why? 'Cause in the first place I caught him tryin' to bushwhack Bert here with a .45-90 about a half-hour ago, an' in the second place he's done sloped an' ain't here no more."

"You caught him tryin' to bushwhack me!" repeated the startled Bert.

"From a side window o' the hotel dinin'-room. So whatsa use o' botherin' with a man like that? Aw, s'all right Bert, s'all right. No trouble a-tall to curry a li'l' short hoss like that. C'mon, Tom."

"WHERE do you guess Skinner'll go?" asked Tom when he and his brother were pulling off their boots in their room that night.

"Maybe he'll go after Usher; maybe he'll go visitin' friends or take a trip to Yurrup. They say that's a great country—kings an' queens an' all like that."

"S'pose now he hooks up with Rum Durkin an' Spunk Lenn? She's smore'n likely they're out in the hills some'ers waitin' for friend Hollister—or maybe they're in town this minute. I never thought o' that."

Tom reached again for his boots.

"Clam down, ol' squinchmore, clam down," advised Red, stretching out his legs and wriggling his toes. "I ain't gonna do no more kitin' round tonight, an' you ain't neither. Call it a day, for Gawd's sake, call it a day!"

From the boots Tom's hand came away reluctantly.

"Well—" he began, then changed direction with, "Listen here, cowboy, would yuh really 'a' stuck the point o' that skinnin'-knife under his finger nails?"

"Would you?"

"I dunno." Business of doubtful head-scratching.

"Neither do I. Quit yawpin' fool questions an' lemme go to sleep, will yuh?"

CHAPTER XXXI

THE DUST CLOUD

IN THE morning Red and Tom went to breakfast as if nothing untoward had occurred. The hasher when she served them and the cook glancing in did not bend upon them the darkling eye of suspicion.

But it seemed to them, when they left the hotel to walk abroad, that Mr. Dick Stratton, a hundred yards down the street, dodged round a corner rather swiftly.

Red and Tom promptly followed the example set. Then, being wide between the eyes, they separated.

Mr. Dick Stratton, crouching with malice aforethought and a gun in his hand behind a spare wagon-box stored in an open space between a corral and an empty house, heard an apologetic cough in his rear. Mr. Stratton turned a slow head. Twenty yards away Red Kane stood staring at him. Red's gun was out. He was smiling. Mr. Stratton discerned no sweetness in the smile.

"Have you lost somethin'?" queried Red.

"Lost somethin'?" repeated Dick Stratton, his eyes venomous. "What makes you think I've lost anythin'?"

"'Cause you look just like a gent who's a-huntin' for somethin' a heap anxious—a heap anxious."

Dick Stratton was consumed with hate at Red's drawl, but he said never a word. He might have been a man of stone, so still he held his muscles.

"Maybe my brother Tom can help yuh—in what yo're doin'," suggested Red. "He's yonder on yore right."

Dick Stratton did not turn his head. He continued to regard Red unblinkingly with his cold and fishy eyes. But an observer, looking closely, might have seen upon his forehead small and starting dots of moisture.

"Scrape yore foot, Tom," said Red. "He don't believe me."

Tom scraped his foot. Dick Stratton batted his eyes once.

"If yo're thinkin' o' raisin' that gun," Red remarked conversationally, "I'd think a li'l' longer. Yeah, I would so. Say, Stratton, what was you doin' over on the trail to the Rafter O yes'day?"

This last at a venture.

"Huh?" frowned Dick Stratton.

"You'n' that friend o' yores, I'd oughta said," Red galloped on, "'cause they was two o' yuh. What didja cut down on us for,

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anyway? We hadn't done yuh no harm."

Red's tone was high and whining, but Mr. Stratton was not deceived. He was a gambler and as such accustomed to taking chances, but he was beginning to find the morning chilly.

"What didja do it for?" persisted Red. "A half inch lower an' you'd 'a' bust my hoss's back."

"Why, yore hoss wasn't hit!" denied Mr. Stratton, surprized out of his cautious silence.

"So you looked, didja?" drawled Red, his smile broadening as his eyes narrowed. "Then you was up on that hill. Who was with yuh? Is he layin' for us too behind a doorway or somethin'?"

It may have been that Mr. Stratton thought he saw a movement of Red's gun hand. It may have been that he merely wished to terminate the conversation in the most effective manner. At any rate he went into sharp action at the tail of Red's words. Even as his body jerked to one side, his six-shooter twinkled out and up and spat a dart of flame once and once only. For Red's gun had beaten the barrier by a shade and driven an accurate bit of lead through and through the gambler's shoulder.

Nevertheless, Dick Stratton did not wilt. Despite the burning pain in his right shoulder that made his head swim, his left hand groped toward the fallen gun.

But Red's boot-toe reached the weapon first and kicked it three yards away.

"——," muttered Mr. Stratton, and he sat up and held his wounded shoulder while the blood ran through his fingers.

"Here comes the other one," said Red as pelting feet thudded on the sidewalk beyond the corral.

A gentleman carrying a double-barreled shotgun skidded round the corner of the corral. At sight of Red and Tom and their extreme readiness for battle he halted, dropped the shotgun and tossed his hands up all in one motion.

The gentleman was a total stranger to the brothers, but he had a guileful eye. Red ordered him to advance, and he continued to hold him up with alert care while Tom searched him for offensive arms.

From saloons and stores and residences came the inhabitants of Flipup, both male and female, and looked on from a distance. Mr. Stratton continued to drip redly through his fingers.

"I'm bleedin' to death," he complained.

"No such luck," contradicted the unfeeling Red. "We'll attend to your case when we get through with yore friend here."

"Ain't my friend," grunted the suffering Stratton.

"He'd like to be then," grinned Red. "He's been winkin' at yuh steady for the last minute. I wonder does he know Skinner. Feller, do you know Skinner?"

The gentlemen with the guileful eye shook his head promptly.

"Never heard of him in my life," he denied. "I'm a stranger here."

"You'll keep right on bein' one, too, 'cause yo're leavin' us now."

"What's the row?" A well-known voice, a bustle in the crowd. The marshal and his bulbous nose had arrived.

"Row," repeated Red, without removing his gaze from the gentleman of the guileful eye. "I don't see no row. Tom, gent wants a row. You seen any?"

"I don't even see the beginnin's of one," Tom replied significantly, looking hard at the marshal.

The marshal returned the stare with difficulty. He had long since realized the caliber of the brothers. He wished most fervently for the heartening presence of Bradley Usher. He would know how to settle in jigtime the shooting of Stratton. The marshal's shifting gaze signaled his indecision.

"Look here, marshal," burst forth the man with the guileful eye, "ain'tcha got nothin' to say in this town a-tall? This jigger with the gun says I gotta leave town."

"Don'tcha think he'd better, marshal?" asked Red softly. "It'll save trouble if you sort o' string yore chips with mine."

The emphasis on the word "trouble" had been ever so slight, but the marshal's sense of hearing was acute. Yet he hesitated.

Bang! Red's six-shooter crashed. The gentleman with the guileful eye jumped two feet in the air and clapped a hand to an agonized ear, the tip of which was missing.

"Stick them hands up!" bawled Red. "You ain't lost nothin' to speak of o' that ear. You got all the rest to hear with. One an' a fraction is good enough for a white man, let alone a hoss-thief like yoreself. How about it, marshal? Ain't Flipup better off without this sharp?"

"You bet she is," declared the officer,

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whom Red's unexpected shot—even as Red had intended—had brought to see the light. "I'll see he leaves town myself."

"I'll help you see," said Red dryly and faced about his captive.

"I'd like my shotgun an' that six-shooter the other feller took off me," protested the prisoner, hanging back in the breeching.

"You can keep right on likin'. They ain't no law against it. Git a-goin'."

The captive got. A gun muzzle jammed with great force into one's lumbar region is a potent persuader.

Together Red and the marshal escorted the gentleman with the guileful eye to the hitching-rail in front of the Pansy saloon.

"I'll be back," snarled the fellow, swinging up.

"Be shore I ain't here when you come," Red advised pleasantly. "You got one minute to get out o' range."

SOMEWHAT to Red's regret the stranger beat out the sixty seconds by a safe margin.

Red turned to the marhsal.

"Who was that feller?" he queried.

"Don'tcha know him?" said the marshal, elevating surprized eyebrows. "That's Bill Doran. He's Brad Usher's foreman out at the Empire."

"The Empire Mine?"

"Shore."

"Then he ain't exactly a stranger in Flipup, is he?"

"Not much he ain't. Why?"

"I was just wonderin', just wonderin'. Say, he's turned to the left where the trail forks. Is that the Empire trail?—Yeah? Plain trail alla way, huh? Ain't nature wonderful?"

"But what's Brad Usher gonna say about it all?" worried the marshal, heeding not Red's nonsense. "His men ain't never quarreled among themselves before."

"Djever stop to think we maybe had our orders? They's such a thing as Usher gettin' tired o' part of his help. I ain't tellin' all I know, but you can put down a bet shootin' Stratton an' runnin' out Doran was a heap the proper caper."

"So that's how it is." The marshal drew a relieved breath. "I guessed that might be the way of it. I wonder what them two done to get Brad on the prod."

"You'll have to ask Brad, or maybe Skinner'd know."

Red was watching the marshal closely when he mentioned the landlord's name. The officer's expression did not alter.

"Yeah," he said without interest. "We better be gettin' back."

"Shore," assented Red, beginning to think that the marshal knew nothing of the difficulty of the previous evening. "Stratton oughta be fixed up."

"I s'pose I'll have to see he's took care of till he's able to travel," grumbled the marshal. "I don't see why Brad——"

"They ain't no use fussin' about Brad," Red cut him sort sharply. "He does things the way he likes an' has 'em done similar. You don't see Skinner round town anywhere, do yuh?"

"Skinner! Yuh don't mean——"

"I mean Skinner's left town, an' I don't think he'll be back right away."

The marshal stopped short in his tracks and stared helplessly at Red Kane.

"Why, Skinner was about as close to Brad as his skin."

"He ain't no more."

Red could not repress a smile. It was pleasant to be absolutely sure that Skinner had not talked with the marshal before leaving town. Which being so, it was doubtful whether he had unbosomed himself to any one save Stratton and the Empire Mine foreman.

"I wouldn't 'a' believed it," muttered the marshal, half to himself. "Skinner! I am ——! Huh?"

"Nothin' C'mon. Mustn't let Stratton go too long."

But they found on reaching the scene of the shooting that Stratton had been bandaged and removed to the shack he shared with the bartender of Rouse's Rest. He was reported by a friend to be resting easily.

"Tha's good," said Red. "You needn't pick that up," he added coldly as the friend stooped to retrieve Stratton's six-shooter.

The friend snatched away his fingers as if the metal had been white-hot. Red scooped up the six-shooter and weighed it in the palm of his hand.

"I always like to keep my souvenirs," he told the embarrassed friend. "You might tell Stratton that."

"I-uh-I will," stuttered the friend and went elsewhere hastily.

The marshal, who knew the friend to be weaker than himself, smiled openly, but Red's countenance remained unmoved.

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He nodded to the marshal and crossed to where Tom, Doran's shotgun in the crook of his arm, was leaning against the stockade of the corral.

"Le's get our hosses, Tom," said he in a low voice, "an' take a li'l' ride."

"Where?"

"To return that shotgun. It belongs to the foreman o' the Empire Mine."

"Now yore whistlin'," said the thoroughly delighted Tom.

Together they went to the hotel corral. The marshal watched them depart and gnawed his under-lip the while.

"I wonder what is up," he asked himself. "Skinner! Who'd 'a' thought it?"

Bill Doran was leaning over the kitchen table bathing his afflicted ear and swearing. So engrossed was he in his immediate affairs that he did not observe a shadow that passed the window, a shadow that stopped at the doorway and fell athwart the kitchen floor.

Something brushed Bill Doran's shoulder and clattered down upon the table with a force that made the basin dance. Which something was a double-barreled shotgun.

Bill Doran at the touch and crash jumped and whirled like a bee-stung horse and made a futile movement with his hand.

"No use reachin' at that empty holster," remarked Red, stepping into the kitchen. "We still got yore gun. You fellers are shore a fine lot to go after anybody. Yo're as bad as Stratton. Don't you ever look behind yuh?"

Bill Doran, backing away, butted into the wall.

"The doorway into the other room is four feet to yore left," drawled Red, "if that's what yo're lookin' for. Nemmine it now. Yo're all right where y' are. Look-it, feller, howja get hold o' the shotgun that killed Dick Lenton?"

At this there was a sudden thud and a pad-pad of bare feet in the next room. Red, leaving Tom to guard Bill Doran, jumped through the doorway in time to see the volatile Mr. Skinner in singlet and shirt escaping through the window. Red hurled himself after and was lucky enough to grab an ankle. Red followed his prey into the outer air and was kicked in the eye by a calloused heel. Together he and Skinner rolled among discarded cans and empty bottles and clawed and tore and struck till Red drove a knee into Skinner's stomach. Instantly the latter went limp. Red arose minus a section of shirt and dragged Skinner by the left leg into the house.

When Skinner could talk he addressed himself to Bill Doran.

"Why in —— didn't you tell me they was comin'?" he demanded bitterly.

"Whyn —— didn'tcha come to life when I asked yuh to tie up my ear?" returned Bill Doran. "If yuh'd done that instead o' sleepin' away like a prize hawg, this wouldn't 'a' happened. You'd 'a' heard 'em comin'. How in —— d'juh think I can hear anythin' with one ear full o' blood? I never could hear so awful good out o' the other, an' you know it. You make me sick! If these two idjits with the guns wasn't so rambunctious I'd shore make you hard to find."

"Yah-h!" sneered Skinner with a malevolent grin.

"I got three men workin' here," went on Bill Doran, transferring his attention to the brothers. "They'll——"

"I seen 'em," Red interrupted placidly. "Old fellers they was, the three. Besides, they're in the tunnel. We seen 'em go in before we come out in the open. Don't fret about them doin' nothin'. They won't. Nemmine edgin' any closer to Skinner, Bill. 'Taint polite to go nudgin' folks yuh dunno, an' yuh told me yoreself less'n a half hour ago yuh didn't know Skinner. Thassall right. I don't wonder yuh was ashamed to admit yuh knowed him. Be ashamed myself, an' Gawd knows I ain't partic'lar. Skinner, stop squinchin' yore feet an' look at me. We was interrupted last time we met, an' you went away without sayin' so long. S'pose now yuh go on from where yuh left off."

"Interruptions are becomin' a habit," grunted Skinner. "We're gonna be again."

AT THE same instant Red heard the approaching horse and went to the door. Along the Flipup trail raced a rider. The horse he did not recognize. Thirty seconds later Red saw that the rider was Bert Kinzie. The latter tore up, jerked his horse to a rearing halt and cried:

"They're after yuh! Git a-goin'!"

"Who's after us?" demanded Red.

"Most o' Flipup. Nemmine askin' questions. Yuh ain't got time. Tell yuh about it later. Git a-goin'."

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Red Kane sprang back indoors.

"C'mon, you fellers!" he shouted at Bill Doran and Skinner. "Get out to the corral! Pick up yore saddles and bridles first! Quick!"

"Whatcha want them for?" asked Bert Kinzie in astonishment as Red and Tom herded their captives out to the corral.

"Do you know any shortcut out o' this country?"

"Shore not—only the trails."

"Me too. But these fellers live here. They know the way the cañons run. They'll show us the way out. Git along, you two. Stand there by the woodpile."

From their position at the woodpile the prisoners could not see the trail to town and the distant dust-cloud that hung above it.

Red knocked free the foot-long lever of the wire-fastened gate and ran in to rope two of the three horses standing in hipshot drowsiness in a shady corner. To his disgust he discovered that two of the horses were lame—one in the off shoulder, the other in the near fore. Red returned to the gate swearing and dragging the third animal. Bill Doran's mouth lifted at one corner.

"I thought I was out o' luck when I lamed that gray comin' home this mornin'," he said with a chuckle. "Now yuh can only take one of us."

"Just for that," drawled Red, bridling the gray, looking from beneath his eyebrows at the face of Skinner, "just for that we're gonna take yuh. Aw right, Tom?"

Tom, who had been passing the cinch-straps, leaped back to his own horse.

"Git aboard, Skinner," Red ordered sharply.

"Me? I thought you was gonna take Bill!" A grievous horror was in Skinner's face and tone.

"I changed my mind when I seen how yore face changed from sad to happy when I told Doran I'd take him. Don't pull that rope too tight, Tom. He's gotta breathe. Git aboard."

The cold, hard muzzle of Tom's six-shooter jabbed Skinner in the short ribs. He stuck his bare toes in the stirrup and swung up with a wail of—

"For —— sake, gents, lemme put on my pants!"

Red ran to the house while Bill Derr and Tom Kane fidgeted in their saddles with impatience. They, too, had seen the distant dust-cloud. Every second brought it nearer.

Within a half minute Red returned on the run, a shapeless bundle under his arm and a merry glint in his eye. Under the circumstances the glint seemed out of place.

"Where's my hat?" demanded Skinner.

"You don't need no hat," replied Red, mounting with difficulty by reason of the bundle. "Let's go, Skinner. You'n' me'll lead the way."

"Them ain't my pants!" cried Skinner, eying the bundle.

"Ain't they? That's tough. Skinner, if we're caught by that posse, you won't never need to make a fuss about pants again. An' if you gamble with us by fallin' off, just remember they's only twenty feet o' slack between the loop o' rope round yore neck and Tom's saddle-horn. Now you get us to the line the shortest way. How about it, Skinner?"

"Straight for that cañon," directed the sulky Skinner.

Red waved an ironic farewell to Bill Doran.

"So long," he shouted. "I'll ask Skinner about that shotgun."

The four horsemen, well bunched, whirled past the end of the corral. Skinner rapped out a hearty oath.

"Yeah," called Red above the thudding beat of the flying horseshoes, "that cloud o' dust ain't more'n two miles away, but it ain't gonna do you a bit o' good. Naw, sir."

"Gimme them clo'es," demanded Skinner.

"Yo're talkin' foolish," said Red, tying the bundle to his saddle-strings. "Them clo'es stay with me till we're across the line."

Skinner proved a clever guide. It was down this cañon and up that, follow a creek-bed for a mile or two, then across and up the rocks of a slide where a single stumble would have written *finis* for the stumbler. Through woods of pine and cedar where the wind soughed mournfully and no birds sang, across sun-drenched boggy meadows grown up in rank, high grass that brushed the rider's knees, over bare ridges and through dry wastes they rode without a halt, to the pain and anguish of Skinner, who called upon his gods to witness that he was becoming more saddle-sore by the

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minute, till they came at last to the creek that marked the boundary line between the State and the Territory.

They threshed across in a swirl of eddies and pushed on a good five miles before stopping to make camp.

"Ol' Skinner ain't such a hell-devil after all," said Red, sliding to the ground and stretching his legs. "We didn't see no sight o' them fellers once, an' Bill Doran musta told 'em which way we went. We're obliged to yuh, Skinner."

"I'll be obliged if yuh'll take off this —— rope an' gimme them clo'es," grumbled Skinner.

"Why, shore," assented Red cheerfully. "Tom, will yuh take off the gent's halter?"

Skinner dismounted and proceeded immediately to finger with the utmost tenderness various parts of his anatomy.

"I'm raw like a skinned cow," he complained. "They ain't no skin left inside my knees an' my shoulders is all sunburned to —— 'n' gone."

"That's shore tough," sympathized Red. "Here's yore clo'es."

He tossed to Skinner what appeared to be an ancient checked calico wrapper and a sunbonnet. Appearances were not deceptive. They were a calico wrapper and a sunbonnet. Skinner spread them out upon the ground and stared at them in anguish and dismay.

"My pants!" he moaned. "Wasn't they no pants in that bundle?"

"Nary a pant." Red shook his head.

"They was my blue flannel shirt on the outside a-wrappin' these here up," insisted Skinner. "I seen it."

"Shore they was a shirt. Here she is."

Cursing under his breath, Skinner ducked his head into the tail of the shirt and pulled it on.

"I don't see why in —— yuh didn't get my clo'es," he fretted. "They was hangin' right in plain sight on the chair by my bunk, an' that fool wrapper an' sunbonnet is the other suit o' Bill Doran's breed cook, which she's went to town for the day, an' they was hangin' in the kitchen behind the stove. Yuh got my shirt all right. Why——"

"Maybe I wanted to see how you'd look in woman's clo'es," said Red without a trace of a smile.

"I won't put 'em on," gurgled Skinner.

"That's all right too. Ride in yore shirt-tail for all I care. But that wrapper an' sunbonnet is all the clo'es yo're gonna get for a while, an' you can stick a pin in that."

"Ain'tcha gonna turn me loose now?"

"Not now—not by a jugful we ain't. We like yore company, Skinner, an' we aim to keep yuh for a spell where we can look at yuh."

The wretched Skinner dropped his eyes to the wrapper and the sunbonnet. Then, swiftly stooping, he rolled the two together into a compact bundle and sat down upon it with a gusty groan.

CHAPTER XXXII

A PLEASANT EVENING

AFTER supper they lashed Skinner hand and foot and fore and aft between two trees and withdrew to a distance. All this at the instance of Bert Kinzie, who had whispered to Red during the ride from the Empire that what he had to say was not for the ears of Skinner.

"They's a warrant out for yuh," Bert Kinzie said without preliminary.

"Both of us?" Red cocked an expectant eyebrow.

"Both o' yuh."

Tom swore frankly.

"There," he snarled, turning on his brother, "I told yuh so!"

"Shut up. Le's hear the rest of it."

Red nodded to Bert Kinzie.

"She's thisaway," said the manhunter. "Last night, when we got Hudson safe across the line to Sparksburg, we bedded him down in the jug an' went to the hotel ourselves. She's kind o' late, but the barkeep says another gent's gettin' grub an' we can eat. The other gent turns out to be Kansas Casey. First thing he asks us have we seen you two. I kicks Bill under the table to keep his trap shut an' I told Kansas we ain't, 'cause they's a look in Casey's eye I don't like.

"We get to talkin' an' she all comes out fine as frawg's hair in August. They's warrants out against both o' yuh—Red for bustin' into the jail an' unhobblin' Lenton an' Tom for helpin' Red an' arson."

"Arson!" Tom repeated blankly. "Who's he—this Arson?"

"Arson ain't a feller; she's only law language for burnin' up anythin'. They

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seem to think Tom set fire to his barn so's to keep folks away from the calaboose."

"The idjits!" exclaimed Red, irritated to learn that Farewell was capable of coordinated thought. "The —— —— idjits!"

"That's what I told Kansas," said Bert Kinzie, looking steadily at Red, "but he's sort o' got the notion you two gents are in Flipup."

"I wonder why."

"He seems to think yuh'd do anythin' to clear Lenton o' that murder charge, an' Flipup is shore the likeliest place to begin."

"Yeah." Red scratched his chin. "Ain't he the li'l' hellion!" he muttered.

"'Course, he couldn't take yuh back with him, but he didn't figger on no trouble about havin' yuh held till he could extradite yuh. He wasn't feelin' none too good at havin' to arrest yuh, I'll say that for him. But yuh know Kansas. The silver star means a lot to him. Well, when I heard all I needed to know I borrowed a fresh hoss an' slid out early in the mornin' on the back trail, an' I guess Kansas musta suspicioned somethin', 'cause he drifts out, too, an' I seen him a-humpin' after me maybe a couple o' miles back. I got field-glasses and I could tell it's him. You better believe I rode. I outrun him to Flipup all right, but I lost one lot of time before I found out which trail yuh took out o' town. Lucky they wasn't nobody else takin' that trail or I'd 'a' lost yore tracks at the fork. My ——, I was in a sweat, 'cause I knowed Kansas wouldn't lose no time, an' he ain't no slouch of a trailer himself. Well, I gotta be siftin' along back to Sparksburg."

He arose and stretched his arms crackingly.

"Just out o' spite now, Bert," said Red Kane, "I'll do you a good turn some day. I guess me'n' Tom are a heap obliged to yuh."

"That's all right. No call to be obliged. Didn't you head off Skinner from drillin' me? Well then, whatcha talkin' about?"

"Just a shake, Bert. Who swore out them warrants?"

"Buck Saylor, Lumley an' Billy Bruff."

"Why in —— you lookin' so happy?" Tom demanded savagely of his brother. "You might— Look at him! Look at the poor fool, Bert! He's laughin'."

"Who wouldn't laugh," chortled Red, pounding his leg in glee. "Buck Saylor! O' course it would be Buck. I might 'a' guessed it. Buck Saylor shore explains a lot o' things."

"Then s'pose you explain a few," snapped Tom. "I'd just like to know what's what, bein's I'm like to be arrested most any time now."

"Wait till I work her all out. Yo're takin' Hudson to Farewell, ain'tcha, Bert?"

"Shore. He'll have to go there first before goin' back to Marysville."

"In a hurry?"

"Why?"

"We'd take it as a favor if yuh'd use up two weeks gettin' to Farewell. How about it?"

"Shore. What's two weeks between friends? Anythin' else?"

"If yuh could manage to see he stays in Farewell a week before he's sent south, it would give us a li'l' more time in case—in case—just in case."

"Gawd, he knows what yo're drivin' at, Red, I don't. But I'll do my best to have Hudson stay in Farewell a week. Look out for Kansas now. He's one perseverin' gent in pants, an' yuh can put down a bet on that. So long."

Tom Kane watched Bert Kinzie mount his horse and ride away. Then he sat back on his heels, drew a long breath and opened his mouth.

"Don't say it," urged his brother. "This ain't no time to be humorous."

"Humorous!" exploded Tom. "Humorous! Which you make me so hot I could feed you wolf-pisen! Of all the —— —— fools I ever see yo're shore the —— ——! You an' yore bright li'l' plan for turnin' Ben Lenton loose has got us in a fine tangle, a fi-ine tangle. Oh, yes, says you, it'll work out all same fallin' off a log, but you didn't say the log might be standin' straight up an' they might be ropes round our necks to keep us from fallin' too far. No, you didn't say nothin' about that. Not a word. I s'pose you thought that crowd o' hard-ridin' Flipup folks was somethin' to laugh at, huh? Well, it didn't tickle me, not a solitary tickle. An' ——"

"Aw, whatsa matter with yuh?" interrupted Red. "You act as if yore neck was the only neck in the world."

"I still gotta see the neck I'd like better," counted Tom. "An' I'm aimin' to keep it fit to breathe through. An' I got a business

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in Farewell too. Maybe you've forgot that. How'm I gonna go back? How's either of us gonna go back, I'd like to know? Can'tcha do nothin' but sit there like a fat-headed mud-turtle an' snicker? This here is serious, you saddle-galled idjit, serious."

"Shore, she's serious," admitted Red. "I can see that."

"Oh, you can, huh? You see they's somethin' in this, do yuh? That's fine, that is. Might I ask, if she ain't too much, now that yuh see we're out on a limb an' the bear a-waitin', what yo're gonna do about it?"

"You can ask," said Red, inhaling a cigaret with a placidity that made Tom yearn to smite him. "You can do that, o' course. But why worry, Tom? Why worry?"

"Why worry? Why worry?"

"Shore, ain't I here?"

"An' I wish you was some'ers else, an' had stayed there ten years an' was countin' on stayin' ten years longer. I ain't got the words to tell yuh what I think o' yuh."

"Don't try. Yuh might choke. Listen —an' stop cussin'. Yo're beginnin' to repeat yoreself anyhow, so yuh might's well— Listen, will yuh? They ain't no danger o' our not callin' the turn. Get that through yore thick head an' be happy."

"Howja know that?" Tom demanded unbelievingly.

"Well, we might have one chance in twenty o' losin'," qualified Red. "But what's one in twenty? Why, no risk at all. I'll get us out o' this too easy. Leave it to me, cowboy, leave it to me."

"Huh! Might 'a' knowed yuh didn't know what yuh was talkin' about. Leave it to you! Ain't I been a-leavin' it to you? An' look what's happened. Look what's happened!"

"Yo're millin' again. Sign yo're gettin' old or losin' yore peanut of a mind or somethin'. Listen, I got a plan."

"Another one!"

"Shore. I——"

"You'n' me are gonna part right here. Plans! Plans! Plans! Yuh don't introduce me to no more plans, not while I got my health!"

"Sidown an' shut up. I tell yuh I got four aces an' a joker that'll back them warrants plumb off the table into the stove."

Tom sat.

"IT DON'T sound possible," Tom said musingly.

"It is possible," flared up Red. "Can'tcha see how it is?"

"I didn't mean that. What bogs me down is how yuh puzzled her all out thataway. You don't look like yuh got brains. Still, yuh can't never tell— Leggo! Leggo! Whatcha tryin' to do—sprain my ankle? Stop foolin', will yuh? They's Skinner a-hollerin'. What's he want?"

"Stop yore yowlin'," Red commanded crossly, his fingers busy with the knots in Skinner's bonds.

"I guess you'd yowl, too," snarled Skinner. "You jiggers tied me down right over a ant-hill, an' the ants are riotin' all up an' down my back. Somethin' crawled into my ear too."

"Don'tcha care—it'll crawl out soon's it finds out where it is. An' the sun's near down, an' then the ants'll go home to bed, so yuh really got nothin' to bother yuh a-tall. Yo're shore the most peevish party I ever see. There, yo're loose. Sit up an' be happy. Here's the makin's."

"I'd rather have a pair of pants," fretted Skinner, nevertheless taking the proffered tobacco and papers. "Ain't yuh got even a pair o' overalls in yore war-bags?"

"Lordy, no. Whatcha take us for—dry-goods stores?"

"I might as well be naked, gents. My underclo'es is all tore an' wore to frazzles."

"Don't apologize," Red told him kindly. "Tom an' me don't mind."

"I ain't apologizin'," denied the aggrieved Skinner, shaking a frowsy head. "But I don't like livin' like Adam nohow—too many gnats."

"They's that wrapper an' sunbonnet. What more yuh want? Lookit, if yuh say pants again, yuh don't get no more smokin'. You got a shirt on, a good shirt, an' if yuh sit down cross-legged it'll cover up most o' yuh, an' then the gnats won't have quite such a picnic."

"Why shouldn't they have a picnic?" Tom queried meaningly.

"That's so," said Red. "I never thought o' that. Them gnats are shore gonna be a help. Skinner, take off yore shirt."

But Skinner would not, so they incontinently worried him out of it. Now, reduced anew to desperation and his nether garments, he would have donned the despised calico wrapper. But this they would not allow.

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Skinner gloomily flung grass and green branches on the fire for the purpose of creating a smudge and squatted down to choke and splutter in the rolling coils of smoke. Tom, a Winchester across his knees, kept an eye on Skinner.

"Smudge don't keep off all them gnats, does it?" Red observed cheerfully as Skinner slapped and slapped again the outlying regions of his anatomy. "If you was thinner now, you wouldn't mind 'em so much. They say they's no feelin' in bone. Must be kind o' smothery settin' there in all that smoke. I don't guess it's real good for the lungs. Lordy, Skinner, yuh sound just like a drum when yuh crack yoreself thataway. Can yuh beat the long roll, I wonder? Yuh can't? Well, it don't matter. Gnats gettin' thicker, huh? They will with night comin' on. Yo're due to be one busy li'l' feller, Skinner. About that question now—Who was it killed Dick Lenton?"

Skinner clamped a stubborn jaw and slapped away.

"You'll get tired o' that after a while," continued the drawling voice. "Them gnats are shore active. Tom, I don't guess we'll have to use the knife on him after all."

"No," replied Tom with a serious face, "I guess not."

"An' how," pursued Red, turning back to Skinner, "did Bill Doran come to get Dick Lenton's shotgun?"

There was no reply from Skinner.

"Listen here," Red went on persuasively, "I'm flat-footin' my bets on you, Skinner. When I seen that shotgun, I kind o' thought Bill Doran could help me out. But Flipup spoiled that an' you was elected again. Skinner, you ain't gonna blight my young life by keepin' yore face shut forever, are yuh? Shake yore head for 'No.' Stubborn—stubborn's a mule, an' gittin' a sull on, too. Tom, I'll match yuh for first watch."

CHAPTER XXXIII

SKINNER IS REASONED WITH

IT MAY be said that Skinner passed a bad night. The gnats seemed to become thicker and more active as the hours dragged on. Red-eyed and bitten in more places than he cared to think about, Skinner saw the sun rise clear. It promised a fine day, a most glorious day, but there was no joy in the heart of Skinner. He looked upon the form of the sleeping Tom and ground his teeth. Red looked upon Skinner and closed one eye.

"Yuh know, Skinner," he remarked in a casual tone, "I'd tell who killed Dick Lenton if I was you."

The reply was a curse—to be precise, three curses. But these lacked spontaneity. Observing which and the haggard weariness of Skinner's expression, Red could not suppress a grin.

"Lordy," he drawled, "them li'l' gnats must 'a' been right busy last night. You look sort o' blistery in spots—a whole lot o' spots. Wait till the sun strikes 'em, old settler. You'll shore wish you'd been a better boy."

"You'll gimme my shirt back, won't yuh?" Skinner asked uneasily.

"Not today nor yet tomorrow. The day after, maybe. I'll have to think about it."

"But I tore my undershirt all down the back last night tryin' to get at one o' them gnats," wailed Skinner, aghast at the prospect. "I gotta wear somethin'. Gimme that calico wrapper; I'll wear that."

"You won't even wear the sunbonnet, Skinner."

"But I can't go round this way alla time!" Skinner's red eyes fairly popped with dismay.

"Oh, alla time is somethin' else again. We're talkin' about now. But I'll tell yuh what, feller, if yore troubles get too hard I'll let yuh wear that calico wrapper an' sunbonnet."

Anon they proceeded. But without haste. As Red confided to Skinner, "We got all the time they is." Which was no doubt why in the course of the morning they traveled consecutively north, east, south and west.

"This sun is killin' me," moaned Skinner. "Why yuh got to follow these dry washes alla time? They's some shade over there by them trees. Why can't we go that way? An' where yuh goin', anyway? We ain't done nothin' since sunup but head first this way an' then that way like lost tender—ouch!"

The exclamation was called forth by Skinner's inadvertently resting a sunburned forearm on the brass of his saddle.

"Horn kind o' hot, huh?" drawled Red.

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"It would be. Lordy, man, yo're red as the brand on a Wild Rose tomatter can. When them li'l' gnat jiggers come scatterin' over yuh tonight, you'll have a party."

"Yo're torturin' me," declared Skinner.

"Never a torture. We wouldn't torture yuh. Ain't I told yuh we wouldn't? You can take my word. It's them gnats an' the sunshine. We can't help it if them gnats think yo're good to eat. It ain't our fault if they don't know no better. An' we can't help the sun, can we?"

"You can gimme a shirt or that wrapper!" cried the goaded Skinner, trembling in the saddle with varied emotions.

"Now that's just what we can't do," said Red warmly. "Can we, Tom?"

"——, no! it wouldn't be right nohow."

"So that's how it is, Skinner. Neither Tom nor me sees how we can help yuh out without yuh tell us what we wanna know about Dick Lenton's killer, an' also how Bill Doran come to have Dick Lenton's shotgun. We gotta know them things, Skinner. We just gotta, an' yuh can stick a pin in that."

Skinner stiffened a sore back and gazed straight ahead. Red winked at Tom.

"He's weakenin'," he said in a half-whisper.

"I ain't!" yapped Skinner. "I'll never tell!"

"Root hog or die, feller, root hog or die. Who killed Dick Lenton? Was it you or Lumley or Bruff or Usher? Who done it?"

Skinner gritted his teeth and clenched his hands. His nerve was not yet shattered.

"That wrapper," observed Red, "would shore keep some o' the sun off. So would the sunbonnet. Does the back o' yore neck hurt, Skinner? I wonder is he in danger o' sunstroke, Tom. Whadda yuh think?"

"Not so long's we keep movin' he ain't."

A remarkably tough bird was Skinner. He did not weaken throughout that long, hot Summer day. When they stopped to camp for the night, he dismounted with a painful stiffness that would have been pitiable in a less reprehensible member of society. As it was, Red nodded approvingly. Another day or two, he decided, would call the turn and call it correctly. Tom was not so sanguine. Skinner was displaying uncommon fortitude. The pain of his bites and burns must have been agonizing.

Red had chosen the camp site with admirable discrimination. The gnats were present in clouds. They fell upon the puffy Skinner with promptitude and avidity. They even proved annoying to Red and Tom.

That night Skinner endeavored to run away. Red, on guard that watch, let him run. This greatly to the surprize of Skinner, who had expected to be shot at. A moment later Skinner, bounding like a frightened coyote under the pale light of a dry new moon, dashed into a patch of what appeared to be high grass but was really a dense and healthy growth of young briars.

A sinuous tendril as thick as a lead pencil and armed with thorns by the dozen wrapped itself round the ankle of Skinner and jerked him down. Oh, it was then that he yelled and swore and floundered.

Red, strolling up a moment later, seized him by the hair and yanked him out of that. Skinner, sore, scratched, his skin a living fire, aching in every bone, sat up and blinked at Red.

"Thought I wasn't watchin' yuh, didn't-cha?" observed Red, his hands folded over the muzzle of his Winchester. "You poor idjit, whadda yuh guess I sat down by that bullsap and begin to nod for? Just so yuh'd try to pull yore freight. Knowed yuh would. Knowed yuh'd run this way. Only way open for yuh to run. An' these briars so nice an' handy. Funny yuh didn't notice 'em like I done while we was makin' camp."

Slowly two great fat tears oozed from Skinner's eyes and furrowed their way down his dirty cheeks. With a grunting cry he flopped over on his side, hid his face in his hands and began to sob.

It is no pleasant thing to witness the weeping of a man—even such a man as Skinner. Red sucked in his under-lip, his brows drawing together. He would have preferred to be merciful, but there are times when mercy is out of place. This was one of those times. He called to his sleeping brother.

Between them they dragged the now hysterical Skinner back to camp. They tied him to a tree and soused him with many hatfuls of water.

"Now or never," said Red when Skinner showed signs of emerging from his emotional paroxysm. "If he don't snitch now after all he's gone through, he's a howlin' wizard."

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"Which he ain't," declared Tom. "Hop to it."

Red sank down on his heel in front of the bound man. The thin moonlight slanted across Skinner's face and body. He was a most unlovely object.

"Skinner," said Red, "who killed Dick Lenton?"

Skinner merely rolled his eyes. Red repeated the question. Skinner dropped his chin forward on his breast. His lumpy jaw muscles hardened. Monotonously Red repeated the question. But never a word said Skinner. Till Red's throat became dry and his voice husky, he put the question to Skinner at ten second intervals. Then he gave way to Tom. When Tom tired, Red took on the job again. Still Skinner held out.

Suddenly Red changed his line of questioning.

"Skinner," said he, "tell me how Art Teller got hold o' Dick Lenton's three-diamond ring?"

Skinner came alive with a jerk.

"Say—say that again!" he demanded.

"Tell me how Art Teller come to get Dick Lenton's three-diamond ring."

"Howja know Art's got it?"

"He ain't got it. He had it. I took it off him. Here it is. Ever see it before?"

Red, having extracted the ring from the inner pocket where it lay, held it up between his thumb and forefinger. The moonshine struck tiny sparks of greenish fire from the three diamonds.

Skinner's puffed eyes glowered at the ring. He gulped. He gulped again. Then he cursed Art Teller with passionate intensity. He likewise cursed several other people, of whom presently.

"He told me that ring was lost, the —— —— liar!" declared Skinner at the tail of his tirade.

"Who told you?" Red asked quickly.

"That lousy dog Teller! Who do yuh s'pose? He skun me out o' that ring! It was gonna be my share!" Thus Mr. Skinner in part. Most of his remarks were unprintable.

Red tucked away the ring, squatted down on his heel and awaited the end in patience. When it came, he said gently:

"You might tell the rest of it, Skinner. You've done pretty well already."

"Gimme a drink an' that —— female wrapper an' slack off this rope that's cuttin' me in half, an' I will," bargained Skinner. "Skun me, the dirty skunk! I'll show him! My ——," he added, as Red eased off a turn, "my ——, what a relief!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE REAPER

MR. ART TELLER, dozing in the shade of a neatly built cabin at the back of a high ridge, snapped wide-awake of a sudden. Was that the crackle of dry brush? He wondered. He got up quietly, slid into the cabin and reconnoitered the forest from the back window. He saw nothing. The peace of ages was over the landscape. He waited five minutes. Then, hearing nothing, he returned to the outer air—and the muzzle of a six-shooter. Red Kane was behind that muzzle.

Art Teller thrust both hands aloft without being told. Red ordered his victim to face about and separated him from his weapons.

"We meet again," said Red Kane. "Next time, Arthur, when you hear a funny noise off in the woods you'd better make trail without waitin' a second. You did hear a funny noise in the woods, didn't-cha? That was Tom playin' tricks on yuh. Here he comes now."

"Who's that with him—a woman?

"What—why, it's Skinner! What'n ——! He's snitched! By ——! He snitched on me!"

"You hadn't oughta held out the ring on him, Artie. That wasn't square. That was tinhorn work an' one big mistake. Whadda yuh know about Skinner that the sheriff would like to know? He snitched on you, Artie. Now you snitch on him. What could be fairer than that?"

Red beamed expansively upon Art Teller. The latter glowered. He shifted his feet. Red, realizing that Teller was a wily and resourceful person, stepped back a yard.

"I wouldn't," he advised gently. "Yo're quick, but you ain't quick enough. I—just—wouldn't. Was you gonna tell me anythin' about Skinner?"

"Lots o' time for that," said Art Teller, a convulsive tremor rippling across his wizened face. "Later I might tell yuh a lot."

"Any time, any time."

"Can I put my hands down now? You got my gun, an' my elbows hurt."

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"Take 'em down. I'm watchin' yuh."

Arrived then Tom Kane and the wrappered Skinner. Art Teller did not curse Skinner. He merely stood and glared at him. The landlord promptly began to swear and call Teller names.

"You measly Judas," said Teller, lifting his right hand and slowly scratching the angle of his jaw, "whadda yuh think yo're gettin' out o' this?"

"Never you mind," said Skinner triumphantly. "I ain't gonna be hung, anyway."

At the tail of the words Art Teller's hand, the one that had been rubbing his jaw, flashed to the back of his neck and flashed forward again with equal uncanny speed. Followed a twinkle in the air, a whir, a cough, and Skinner was down, a ten-inch bowie transfixing his throat.

It must not be supposed that in the above situation Red remained idle. He was quick, but the knife-haft had left Art Teller's hand the veriest fraction of a second before Red's bullet shattered the bones of the palm.

Art Teller sat down calmly on a bench beside the cabin door. He held his right wrist with his left hand and gazed with satisfaction upon Skinner sobbing his life away on the grass.

"Takin' the knife out won't help him any," sneered Art Teller. "He said he wouldn't be hung an' I guess for once he spoke the truth. Judas!"

Art Teller lifted his upper lip and spat upon the ground. Willingly Tom could have killed him where he sat. Skinner, the star witness, indeed the only one willing to give evidence before a court, dying. In two minutes he would be dead. But there Tom was at fault. Skinner lasted out three and a half.

Tom—he had been kneeling beside Skinner—got slowly to his feet. He planted his hands on his hips and gazed balefully and contemptously at his brother.

"I don't guess now," he said with scorn, "you ever heard of a gent packin' a bowie under the back of his vest. Yo're the sport who yawped his head off 'cause Hollister hid out a derringer on me, ain'tcha? Ain'tcha, huh? An' here yuh let this jigger keep a ten-inch knife right where he can get at it handiest. An' look what he done with it! This is a —— of a note!"

Red, contrite and inwardly castigating himself for a purblind fool, attempted no excuses. In silence he washed, plugged and bandaged Art Teller's wounded hand. When he had completed the task and stepped back, Art Teller lifted up his pale eyes, an unpleasant grin on his wizened face.

"I s'pose you was gonna use Skinner for a witness," said he. "Sort o' figurin' on that, wasn't yuh? Yeah, I guess you was. Well, you won't make me do no talkin' the way yuh made that snitch of a Skinner."

"Won't we?" said Red. "That's shore tough. Have to do the best we can without yuh, I expect."

"An' that won't be much."

"Won't it? Outside o' yore bein' stretched a-plenty, looks like you win, don't it?"

Art Teller grunted and spat. The prospect of the rope did not seem to feaze him. His was a hardened soul.

They spent the remainder of the day and that night at the cabin. For the horses required rest and there was excellent feed in the mountain meadow between the cabin and the forest.

Supper's bacon and coffee disposed of, Art Teller was roped to his bunk for the night and the brothers lay down on the grass beyond ear-shot, there to smoke and wrangle whisperingly.

"An' we was bettin' on Skinner to get us shut o' this muss," snarled Tom, pinching out a half-smoked cigaret. "Now we gotta go to work all over again on this jigger."

"An' this jigger's a different breed o' dog. He ain't soft like Skinner. I guess now Brad made a mistake when he said Teller would be more meachin' than Square Face Higby. Meachin'! The way he slung that knife wasn't meachin' nohow. I'm tellin' yuh, Tom, unless we treat Teller to a two-legged dose of warwhoop big medicine he won't talk. Me, I thought I could manage that all right if I had to, but after watchin' Skinner an' them gnats I'm free to admit I know I can't. So——"

"Yeah. Well?" prompted Tom.

Red did not immediately reply. He rolled over on his back and looked up at the stars of the evening awink above the mountains.

"I'll tell yuh," he said after a space, "Skinner would 'a' been a help. I ain't denyin' it. But we can manage without him."

"We! We! Which yo're takin' too much for granted. I dunno nothin' about no

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'we' whatever. Yo're a-doin' this. You can have all the credit, yuh betcha. I'm free to admit the closer I get to that warrant the less I'm shore yore scheme without Skinner is any good."

"You gotta admit even without him my plan's got its points."

"So has a cow's horns, a paper o' pins an' a barb-wire fence. Speakin' personal, yore scheme reminds me mostly o' the fence. We're snagged so good an' plenty."

"Aw, shut up! You act like it was all my fault! S'pose we are arrested. They can't hold us very long."

"Very long! Very long! Great Goddlemighty! Can't hold us very long! Them's the very words the lawyer sharp told the jigger in jail, an' the poor chunk got twenty year! Nemmine argufyin'! I'm through listenin' to you! Bad luck! Nothin' but! First the warrant an' now Skinner. Aw right, aw right, g'on. You can't make me think no different, but I'll listen if it does yuh any good."

RED did his utmost to convince his brother that Skinner's demise did not necessarily mean the upsetting of their apple-cart. But stubborn as one of his own mules was Tom, a very Covenanter in his convictions. He remained pessimistic no matter what Red said. Even Red's taking the first watch out of turn left him cold.

Red entered the cabin and inspected with a hard eye Mr. Teller and his fastenings. He came out, picked up his rifle, levered home a cartridge and carefully lowered the hammer to the safety notch.

He slumped down on the grass near Tom and began to play one-handed mumbly-peg without the peg. Having successfully three consecutive times tossed "Jack in the blanket," he made no move to pluck the knife out of the ground but sat looking at it with a set and serious face. A wrinkle of worry creased the skin between his eyebrows. Then he scowled at nothing and spoke in a low voice.

"Whatcha swearin' for?" queried the mildly surprized Tom.

"I'm gettin' nervous."

Tom's mild surprize changed abruptly to amazement. Never in his life had he heard Red talk like that and in that tone.

"Whadda yuh mean by nervous, an' nervous o' what?"

"Dot Lenton."

"Maybe she'll give yuh the mitten after all," Tom said hopefully.

"Don't look on the bright side so hard," snarled Red. "I ain't worryin' none about that. It's Brad Usher an' that sheriff an' his man."

"Didn't yuh tell her to watch herself an' stay round town all she could? Didn'tcha tell Telescope to pass the word to Jake——"

"Natur-ally. I ain't a complete fool. You heard me tell Telescope yoreself. But she's venturesome, Tom. She'll think it's her duty to look after the ranch an' the horses while her old man's away, an' she'll do it—an' them three devils wouldn't want a better chance than that."

"They wouldn't have the gall to touch her—not in Fort Creek County. Which they'd be lynched so high the eagles would build nests in their whiskers."

"Remember 'Cutnose' Canter an' 'Rime' Tolliver over there at Moccasin Spring on Soogan Creek. They didn't think nothin' o' no lynchin'. I'd like to know what would 'a' happened to Jane Dale if Chuck Morgan hadn't arrove when he did."

"Nothin' like— Why, lookit—Dot can look out for herself, that girl. Jane Dale was a Easterner from Kansas. Dot Lenton is a old-timer in this country, an' don't you forget it. She's safe. Besides, them hosses o' ours can't go no farther without eight hours rest, if that's what yo're thinkin' about."

"S'pose now she's in trouble," Red persisted doggedly.

"Say, yo're stewin' up all of a sudden, seems to me. You didn't——"

"It just struck me all of a heap like, Tom. I—I keep thinkin' they's somethin' up. I dunno why. But I do."

"Feel it in yore bones, huh?"

"Sort o', yeah."

"I knowed it. You got the rheumatics. That's what you got. Like Uncle Jake an' the Minié ball he got in his leg a-fightin with "Pap" Price's Arkansawyers. He was always prophesyin' rain by the way the leg hurt, an' he was wrong as the leg was nine times out o' ten. So you got no cause to get all sweated up. Most likely yo're wrong, too. Whatcha rarin' about now? Ain't I tryin' to cheer yuh up? Aw right, then, if yuh wanna go on the prod, go on the prod some'ers away from me an' lemme sleep."

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Much to the disgust of Tom, Red insisted on an early start.

"If we pull our freight too fast an' soon," protested Tom, sitting up and rubbing the sleep from his eyes, "we'll get there before Bill an' Bert do."

"It don't matter none," Red told him decisively. "We're goin' home just as fast as our hosses can last it."

It is unnecessary to detail that ride north. Suffice it to say that they pushed their horses to the utmost and, save in one instance when Red made a solitary detour to Damson and Blossom on the railroad, avoided inhabited places. They made more than one dry camp and at the last were reduced for rations to the squirrel—pine, red and ground. This last to the disrelish of Mr. Teller.

"I don't mind so much bein' glommed on to thisaway," he stated, having picked clean the frame of a fat piney; "I been arrested before, so that's all right, but I don't care nothin' about grubbin' on chipmunks, none whatever. Which if I gotta eat any more o' these tree-climbin' mice, I'll shore begin a-chatterin' an' growin' fur. —— of a note, corallin' a gent an' then starvin' him to death."

They wasted no sympathy on the peevish Mr. Teller, but whisked him north with the briskest haste.

ON AN evening Jimmie, the Bar S cook, was mixing bread for the night's setting and singing that mournfulest of songs, "The Mormon Bishop's Lament," when there came a scratching at the cook-shack's open door. Instantly Jimmie ceased his wailing and cocked a listening ear.

"It's me, Red," whispered a familiar voice. "Where's Telescope?"

"C'mon in," Jimmie urged. "I can't leave this bread. They's nobody here, only me."

"I'm doin' fine out here," was the cautious response. "You never know who's snoopin' round. Tell me where Telescope is?"

"Don't you know they's a warrant out for yuh an' Tom too? An'——"

"Shore, I know all that. I read the papers every day. Where's Telescope? How many times yuh want me to ask yuh?"

"He's in the bunk-house. Lookit here, Red. Whatcha aimin' to do? They's a posse out after yuh an' everythin'."

"Ain't that awful. I'm scared to death. Hear me shiver. Go an' get Telescope for me, will yuh, an' keep yore trap shut?"

"I don't blat," was the huffy return. "I ain't no sheep. I guess I got some sense. We're all with yuh, anyway. Shucks, what if yuh did turn Lenton loose? It was fine business, an' them two squirts from Rock County got what was comin'. Say, wasn't they hot? I should say so. Rarin' an' hollerin' round what they was gonna do to yuh when they caught yuh. Oh, they was wild as a nest o' rattlers. Aw, I'm goin', I'm goin'. Bread's all ready to set. Just a shake till I cover her. Yes, sir," pursued Jimmie, warming anew to his subject, "that Sheriff Lumley man was mad enough to chew nails. But he hadn't no manner o' business or right arrestin' that girl."

At this a whirlwind burst into the kitchen and a cant-hook grip clutched Jimmie by the shoulder.

"What's that you said?" demanded a terrible voice.

Jimmie twisted his head to face two blazing eyes.

"You rousy idjit!" he cried. "I didn't arrest her!"

Thus recalled to himself, Red let go and stood back.

"Get Telescope!" he said harshly.

Red, seething inwardly with the knowledge of what had happened to Dot, followed the cook outdoors and sat down on the wash-bench. His fingers closed down and clenched on the edge of the two-inch board that formed the seat. Dot Lenton arrested! Jammed into the calaboose like a horse-thief! He felt a turbulent horror, a raging horror such as one feels who witnesses the profaning of a high altar.

Indeed, for that matter, she was his high altar, his goddess, his sign and symbol of all things good and beautiful.

"Git a-hold o' yoreself, you pop-eyed coot!" he told himself through clamped teeth. "This ain't no time to blow up! No time a-tall! If she's arrested, you'll need all yore fool brains, every last brain!"

From the bunk-house then came Telescope and Jimmie. Red, taking with him the half-breed, promptly faded into the darkness. Jimmie retired to the cook-shack and angrily put to soak the morning's beans.

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"They needn't have rushed off thataway," he muttered, retying the sack. "I wasn't gonna listen."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE BARGAIN

JAKE RULE, sheriff of Fort Creek County, sat in his home at Farewell and gnawed his nether lip. He always gnawed the said lip when worry and the well-known carking care oppressed his being. At present he was very much oppressed. The governor of the Territory had written him a letter stating in the most courteous of phraseology that as a sheriff he was no thief-catcher. The governor failed to understand why nothing had been done to make burglary and stage-robbing a risky means of livelihood. The governor viewed with alarm the amazing lethargy obtaining among the duly constituted officers of the law. The governor begged to be permitted to point out that, while no sheriff had as yet been removed from office by reason of incompetency, it could be done. The above were, in part, the remarks of the governor.

Jake Rule knew that he and his deputy had done their human best to uphold the law and lay by the heels the transgressors thereof. But—the governor was the governor, and he undoubtedly could separate Jake Rule and his well-paid office. Fifteen cents per mile was the mileage allowed and expense vouchers were never questioned by a complaisant treasurer.

Jake gloomily shifted his chew and shot an accurate stream of tobacco juice into the cuspidor. He did not know what to do, and it was necessary that something be done—and quickly.

Sounded a rapping upon the door, and when the door was opened there stood Telescope.

"Mornin', sher'f," said the half-breed, and he looked meaningly at the door opening into the kitchen. "You alone?"

"Shore. The wife's gone down to the store—shoes for the kid or some such devilment."

Telescope entered, carefully closed the door, leaned a straight back against it and hooked his thumbs in his belt.

"You wan' for catch Red Kane?" he asked quietly.

The sheriff, who had resumed his seat, sprang out of it nimbly.

"Where is he?" he cried, lifting down his belt and six-shooter from the peg beside the ammunition company's calendar.

"No hurry," said Laguerre, more than a hint of amusement in the glint of his black eyes. "No hurry 'tall. I deed not say w'ere she was, me. I ask you was you wan' for catch heem."

"Is this a joke?"

"I have no time for joke. Eef you wan' for catch heem, you come wit' me—un leave you' gun home."

"Huh?"

"Red wan' for talk wit' you 'fore she surrendair. Mebbeso you not spleet even wit' heem, mebbeso she not surrendair. Eef you have not de gun, you can not stop heem."

Laguerre grinned toothfully at the astounded sheriff.

"You got a gall!" exclaimed Jake Rule.

The half-breed shrugged his shoulders. "Tak' eet or leave eet," said he calmly. "You do not know where she ees, Red Kane. You have not arrest heem. S'pose you talk wit' him, s'pose she not surrendair you lose nothin'—you w'ere you ees now. S'pose she surrendair, you ween. You come wit' me, un you have nothin' for lose un all for ween."

The sheriff saw the logic in the argument.

"We-ell—"he began hesitantly.

"You leave you' gun, sher'f. Eet weel be all right. I weel be wit' you. Dere weel be no shootin'. You are safe all same as me. Red, she say so. I say so. W'at more you wan' dan dat?"

"How far is the place where Red is?" probed the sheriff.

"Two mile—ten mile—how do I know?" parried Laguerre. "I have not de tape-measure wit' me."

"I'll go yuh," said Sheriff Rule.

An hour later Telescope Laguerre and Sheriff Rule rode into a narrow draw beyond the western end of Indian Ridge. Here, in a small cottonwood clump containing a spring, a gentleman in chaps was frying bacon. He and another gentleman, the latter bound in a seated posture to a cottonwood trunk, were eating the meat as fast as it was cooked.

The gentleman in chaps stood up at sight of the sheriff and smiled expansively. He

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balanced the frying-pan with its sizzling contents in one hand and indicated with the other the bound gentleman.

"Meet Art Teller of Flipup, Colorado, sheriff," said he. "On the seventeenth in the afternoon over near Packer's Peak, this territory, he slung a knife at a gent named Skinner—I never did know his front handle—an' rubbed him out. Me'n' Tom are the witnesses. If you brought along a pair of handcuffs, I dunno but he'll find 'em more comfortable than that rope."

The sheriff blinked at Red's machine-gun delivery of the unexpected. He made no motion toward his saddle-pockets.

"Where's Tom?" he asked.

"Where you won't find him," grinned Red.

"Whatcha wanna talk to me about?" Jake Rule asked impatiently.

"Oh, this an' that—a lot o' things. Have a piece o' bacon? No? Makes all the more for Art an' me, then. Tell yuh what, bacon shore tastes like more when yuh been livin' off chipmunks without salt for three-four days. Last night, when I got to a salt sack, I just stuck my paw in, glommed on to a handful an' ate her dry—so. Here, Art, here's the fryin'-pan where you can reach her."

"Gimme the makin's," snarled the amiable Art. "An' don't look so joyous. I ain't hung yet."

"That's so. Yo're still tied to that tree, ain't yuh? Curious they's so many different ways to use a rope, ain't it? Sheriff, don't yuh think throwin' the rope over a limb an' then just haulin' away is every bit as good as a reg'lar gallows an' a five-foot drop?"

"Tryin' to scare me, huh," blared Teller, his wizened face wrinkling with his best sneer.

"I didn't ride alla way out here to gas about capital punishment," said the sheriff severely. "If you've got anythin' to say, say it."

"Shore, shore-ly," soothed Red. "While Telescope stays with Art, le's you'n' me go off a li'l' ways where the atmosphere's private. Lordy—" as the sheriff frowned—"what yuh balkin' at? What can I do to yuh that I couldn't 'a' done ever since you got here?"

As if he knew that the sheriff would follow, Red turned his back on him and walked out of the cottonwood clump toward a dense growth of box-elders a hundred yards down the draw. Arrived at the fringe of the bushes, he sat down cross-legged and built himself a cigaret.

Two minutes later the sheriff rode up and dismounted.

"You could 'a' come along with me," said Red gently.

"I wanted to put the cuffs on the prisoner first," the sheriff explained sharply.

"I didn't know whether you'd take him prisoner or not—at first," drawled Red. "You looked kind o' funny—at first."

"You can take it I'm still lookin' a heap funnier than I feel. What's the layout?"

RED began to talk. Before he had been speaking five minutes, the sheriff's boredly apathetic expression had been altered to one of the liveliest interest. Red talked on. Occasionally the sheriff would cut in with a question. Often he would tug at his mustache and wink his eyes—a sure sign that he was pleased with whatever might be toward.

Red ceased speaking, pulled the last drag from his fourth cigaret and pinched out the stub. He did not remove his eyes from the sheriff's face.

"How about it?" he asked.

"It could be done," said Jake Rule. "An' then again——"

"I'm takin' that chance. But I ain't worryin'. It'll go through—like that."

He slapped the palm of one hand with the back of the other.

"Yeah?"

The sheriff pushed back his hat and scratched a grizzled head. Now that the tale had ended, he no longer tugged at his mustache or winked his eyes. He appeared doubtful.

"They's only one room an' two cells in the jail," he objected.

"Take the lady into yore own house for the night," snapped Red. "She should 'a' been there all along—if you had to arrest her. An' I'm sayin' right here that was one —— fool play."

"Speakin' for myself," said the sheriff equably, "I agree with yuh. But when Lumley swore out the warrant I hadda serve it. You can see that."

"I know, I know. Telescope told me all about it. Which it's shore healthy for Lumley an' his outfit they didn't bother her outside o' that, but that's enough. Me'n'

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them ain't through yet—not by no manner o' means. Take the lady into yore house, huh? What say?"

"Kind o' irreg'lar."

"So's the whole deal irreg'lar; but if you wait to do it reg'lar, whadda you get? You get Hollister—maybe. 'Cause in that case me'n' Tom are a heap likely to forget a whole lot of evidence, an' that won't help yore case none."

"You wouldn't do that." Uncomfortably.

"Wouldn't we? We would in a minute. An' you better believe that without us the evidence is a heap shacklin'. You do it the irreg'lar way, sheriff—you gotta remember they ain't nothin' strictly illegal about it—an' glom most o' the outfit. Make a name for yuh, Jake, that will. Oughta help yuh come next election."

"You'll get all the credit."

"Don't you fret; I'll give you half. If anybody asks me—an' I won't be none backward about tellin' 'em if they don't—you an' me worked her out between us. I guess that oughta show this county the sheriff ain't exactly a dumbhead mummy."

Jake Rule glanced suspiciously at Red. But the latter's expression was bland to innocence. The sheriff decided that Red was not, in the mention of the qualified mummy, endeavoring to perpetrate a blazer.

"We-ell—" he hedged.

"Now lookit, Jake, if yo're balkin' at the price, you needn't think I dug out the inside of all this for fun. When I went south to riddle out the Lenton killin' I wasn't even thinkin' of bringin' the Farewell express robbery into camp. But, now that I've got it all ready for you to run the brand on, I want what's right, an' yo're the gent to give it to me, yuh betcha."

The sheriff pondered this a moment.

"All right," he said presently, "if it works out at the hearin' like you say I'll fix it up with the judge about them warrants. He'll do what I tell him, I guess."

"Yes, I guess he will, see'n's you got him elected."

"Alla same, it's a hold-up, Red," fiddled the sheriff. "Yo're a-turnin' this express robbery to yore own use."

"Shore I am," Red corroborated heartily. "What didja think I was doin' with it?"

To this the sheriff could not arrange a satisfactory reply. He settled his hat more firmly on his head and spat upon the grass.

"I guess we can do it," was his heavy pronouncement. "Shore," he added, throwing out his chest a trifle, "you an' me, between us we can swing it."

"Want me to go over it again?" inquired Red, suppressing with difficulty a quirk at the corner of his mouth.

"No." The sheriff shook his head and stood up. "I got a good memory myself," he added. "Soon as they get in with Hudson, I'll let you know. Naw, you bet I won't forget to bring Kansas."

"We'll be there, me an' Art," said Red Kane.

When the sheriff had ridden out of the draw, Tom, dragging a rifle, crawled out of the box-elders within ten feet of where the officer and his brother had held their conversation. He joined his brother in the cottonwood clump and poked him in the ribs with a hard forefinger.

"'You an' me,'" Tom quoted, "'between us we can swing it.' Oh, yes, indeedy. Bright feller, li'l' Jakey Rule is. You watch yore eye, Reddy, now you hear me talkin', or you'll find yoreself turnin' handsprings on yore ear. Jake may shuffle the deck too much. Huh? No, not while I got my health, thank you most to death. I told you I had my own notion about givin' up. I still got the notion. If anythin' should happen, I wanna be where I can lay hold of a gun prompt an' plenty. Yes, sir, that's me."

"I weel stay een town," said Telescope, "un I weel keep de eye peel, me. S'pose dem 88 boy een town. Dey weel raise ——, *bien sur*."

"No need for you to mix in this, Telescope," said Red. "You told me comin' here the 88 hadn't locked horns with the Bar S on my account yet. Let 'em alone an' it'll all damp out fine an' dandy. It's me an' Tom they want, an' they won't get me while Jake can lift a gun. An' Tom can take care of himself."

"Oh, shore, Tom can take care of himself," grunted the gentleman in question. "Tom's got it easy. He won't have nothin' to do but dodge over the landscape, look forty ways to once, keep out o' sight an' find out all that's goin' on in town. It's a cinch."

"Look what I gotta do!" cried Red indignantly. "I—" He broke off, his eye caught by the expression of intense interest

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on the face of Mr. Teller. "No," he continued in a more restrained tone, "I guess I ain't talkin' today no more."

ON THE morrow, between noon and one o'clock, Jake Rule came galloping on a lathered horse, shouting that John Hudson had arrived. A few minutes behind Jake rode Kansas Casey. The latter greeted Red with great cordiality.

"Foxed me good, didn'tcha?" said he, assisting Red to boost Art Teller across a saddle. "What did yuh do with yore trail after yuh left the Empire—eat it?"

"We didn't have much else to eat," grinned Red.

Within the hour Farewell was edified by the sight of its efficient sheriff bringing in a prisoner. The prisoner was Red Kane. He was hatless—he had for the sake of atmosphere stuffed his hat into a *cantina*—his hair was frowsily unkempt; he had not shaved since the Lord knew when, and on his wrists sparkled a new and shiny pair of handcuffs.

To the immediate vicinity of Jake and his prisoner the town's inhabitants drew as steel filings to the magnet. Among the first to arrive were Usher, Billy Bruff and Lumley. They found Red arguing violently with the sheriff.

"I wanna hearin' right now," he was insisting.

"You'll get it when I get good an' ready," returned the sheriff.

"Now, by —— !" bawled Red. "This here's a injustice. I ain't gonna stay in no jail so's you can make money a-boardin' me. Naw, sir, I ain't. I wanna hearin' an' I want it immediate."

"You'll maybe get stretched immediate, young feller," called Billy Bruff, oozing triumph from every pore.

"I got a rope," said Lumley, his eyes gloatingly venomous.

Red, looking over the shoulders of the crowd, perceived on the outskirts the long horse-face and high hat of Bradley Usher. The face was expressionless. The jaws worked squirrel-wise. As their eyes met, Mr. Usher half smiled and passed a thumb across his lean throat.

Telescope Laguerre, a yard in Mr. Usher's rear, hitched up his chaps and stared woodenly. Red dropped his eyes to the faces of Bruff and Lumley.

"I hear you two made quite a picture," said he, "with yore hands tied behind yuh an' yore two heads jammed tight under the sash."

"I'm still laughin' last," flung back Lumley. "What say, gents, we take this sport over to the nearest cottonwood?"

It does not matter what manner of man he may be, a citizen, if he wishes, makes friends. The Rock County men had, during their sojourn in Farewell, attached to themselves by the easy ties of drinking and gambling certain members of the loose-living caste. These individuals received with acclaim the suggestion of Mr. Lumley.

The sheriff dropped his hand to his gun-butt.

"This prisoner goes to jail," said he. "Anybody thinkin' different an' puttin' it in the form of a motion goes to the graveyard."

Bill Derr pushed his energetic way through the crowd. He was followed by Bert Kinzie and three of Bert's comrades of the 88—to wit, Bill Allen of the freckled face, Slim Mack and Alonzo Peters, the latter known to his friends as "Crazy Lonzo." In the fight at the Sweetwater ranch-house Red Kane had perforated Slim Mack and Tom Kane had at other times and places drilled holes in both Bill Allen and Crazy Lonzo. But now Slim Mack was grinning cheerily at Red, Bill Allen was shouting encouragement and Crazy Lonzo was swearing that what the sheriff said went, and he, Alonzo Peters, would be proud to see that it went.

Red Kane felt a warm glow expand within him. It was good to find friends—especially in that quarter. Red Kane had cast his bread upon the waters in that dark hotel dining-room, and now it had returned to him four-fold.

"Heart up, Reddy lad!" bawled a voice over the shoulder of Billy Bruff. "You got friends, an' don'tcha forget it!"

Mr. Bruff, turning to frown down his enemy's well-wisher, found himself gazing into the hard-bitten countenance of Mike Flynn, the peg-legged half owner of the Blue Pigeon store. Mr. Bruff turned back to frown elsewhere and looked into the face of his chief, Tom Lumley. Billy Bruff asked a question with his eyes. Lumley shook his head slightly.

The sheriff, who, with his prisoner, had remained on horseback in front of the jail till the crowd was packed solidly between it and them, raised his hand.

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"Li'l' air, gents, li'l' air," he cried good-naturedly. "Move both ways an' lemme get this prisoner into the jug."

"Say, don't I get no hearin'?" protested Red in his loudest yell.

"You don't need no hearin'," snapped the sheriff. "Yo're guilty as all ——. Shut up!"

"Take more'n you to make me, old skimmerindink. I know my rights as a citizen o' this territory. I wanna hearin' an' I'm gonna have a hearin', an' you can stick a pin in that."

"Why don'tcha give him his hearin', sheriff?" asked Bill Derr.

"Shore, give it to him!" vociferously seconded the 88 boys and Mike Flynn.

"It ain't reg'lar," hesitated the sheriff.

"Aw, what's the odds?" said Bill Derr. "Dolan's sober today, an' tomorrow's Sunday, an' Monday he'll be drunk. Give Red what he wants for once in his young life. He'll have long enough to stay in jail till the grand jury indicts him."

So it was settled, and Bert Kinzie went off to find Dolan, the storekeeper who was justice of the peace, the man who had signed the warrant for Red Kane and his brother. In the meantime Red, minus the handcuffs, was deposited in one of the calaboose cells. It was the very cell in which Ben Lenton had spent a few hours. He wondered how Ben was getting along—in the wild places beyond the Three Sisters. He smiled slowly and limbered up his cramped wrists. He thought of Dot Lenton and ceased to smile. She had been held in the jail, perhaps in this same cell. Her eyes had, it might be, looked through the grimy pane of the tiny window.

Her eyes—how they had used to sparkle. And a man could look down into their dark depths for miles and miles and then not see that mysterious thing, the heart of a maid. To hear her say that she loved him, to kiss her on the mouth, he would have sold himself to the devil and damned his soul to hell everlasting and counted it a pleasure.

To please her he would have stolen, lied, killed, cheated at cards or, for that matter, run through the entire list of deviltry eschewed by honest men, without the slightest hesitation. That is how he loved her. Nearly all women and a few men love their beloveds like that. Red Kane was one of the few men.

And after all, even now she might not know her mind or, rather, her heart. Perhaps she did know it, and her answer would be negative. The state of being actually in jail was certainly spinning Red's imagination to the limit. He stared at the wall in dumb misery. At least he was spared the supreme agony. He was sure that there was no one else.

There was a sound of one stirring in the next cell. That would be Hudson. The man began to swear in low, dispassionate tones. Red's mouth stretched into a hard smile. He sincerely trusted that before the day's sun set John Hudson would have reason to swear with the heartiest abandon.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE HEARING

CAME a sudden shuffling in the back room and the clack of conversation and the screaking and thumping of chairs being picked up and set down. The voice of one speaking loudly cut across the clatter, and the voice was that of Dolan.

"Might's well bring Red out, sheriff," he was saying.

At one end of the room the floor rose in a jog a foot high. Upon this platform were a table and two chairs. Dolan occupied the chair behind the table. Red crossed the platform to the other chair, the wire-trussed chair at the end of the platform, and slumped down into it with his most chapfallen air. It was no part of his plan to display confidence at first. Jake Rule took position beside Red—between him and the window.

Red looked furtively over the crowding audience. The place was packed. In the front row of spectators were Sheriff Tom Lumley and Deputy Billy Bruff. Surrounding this precious pair on three sides were Bill Derr, the five 88 boys and peg-legged Mike Flynn. The Farewell friends of the Colorado men were as close to the latter as they could squeeze, but they could not jostle their way past Bill Derr and his partisans without a fight. And a fight was not to be thought of.

Behind the front line, wedged in among other of his friends, were Piney Jackson and that fleshy mountain, Bill Lainey. Red's conscience smote him somewhat for that he had been forced on the night of the jail-break to knock Mr. Lainey cold. But

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what else could he have done? Circumstances had forced his hand or, rather, his fist. He grinned sheepishly at Bill and Piney and nodded.

Red's roving gaze did not at first pick up the long and slithy countenance of Mr. Bradley Usher. In a moment he located the money-lender's glossy black pate behind the broad Stetsons of two punchers from the Double Diamond A. Usher had removed his tall hat and was engaged in the ceremony of purveying himself a chew from the crown. Red was pleased to observe that Telescope Laguerre stood directly in the rear of Mr. Usher. This was as it should be.

"Say!" Justice Dolan cried irritably. "Whatsa matter with you, Red? I've done spoke to you four times. Come alive."

"Why, shore," Red said hastily. "I musta been thinkin' o' somethin' else."

"I guess you musta. Not that she makes no difference to me. Not a bit. I was just askin' yuh if yuh had anythin' partic'lar to say before I hold you for the grand jury. Seems like a plain open-an'-shut case, Red."

"Yeah," drawled Red. "Three witnesses ain't they—Lumley, Bruff, an' Buck Saylor?"

"Yep."

Dolan nodded his head and polished the end of a red-veined nose.

"I don't see Buck Saylor anywhere," complained Red.

Ensued a commotion to the left of Mr. Usher and Buck Saylor poked his head over the shoulder of a stage-station hostler.

"I'm right here," called Buck Saylor with what seemed unnecessary vehemence.

So was Tom Dowling of the Cross-in-a-box right there on Mr. Saylor's left hand. On the other side of the express agent loomed the tall form of Shorty Rumbold.

The wobegone, furtive manner fell as a cloak from Red Kane. He sat up and rubbed his hands together with huge satisfaction and showed his teeth in a tremendous grin. He quite resembled an amiable wolf.

"This," he said clearly, "is somethin' like. Yes, indeedy. Judge, yore honor, I'll begin at the beginnin', huh?"

"That's a good place to start," nodded Dolan. "I'll swear yuh first."

"Just a minute," cut in Tom Lumley. "They's a hold-up in the left-hand cell. Red Kane come out o' the other. I wanna know what's come o' Dot Lenton."

"You do, do yuh?" rapped out Jake Rule. "Well, don't you worry none about her. She's doin' right well where she is, an' where is just none o' yore business."

"I don't like this," Lumley exclaimed. "Somethin' shady goin' on. What you done with her, that's what I wanna know? What kind of a blazer you tryin' to run on me?"

"Where is she, Jake?" queried Dolan.

"In my house with my wife. I'm sheriff an' I'm responsible for her. I don't need nobody to tell me how to take care o' my prisoners."

"Huh!" snorted Tom Lumley.

"I meant you when I said 'nobody'," explained Sheriff Rule.

"I'll remember," purred Lumley, dropping an eyelid. "S'pose we sift along with our sewin'-circle."

"An' that'll be about all from you," struck in Dolan, cracking the table with the barrel of his six-shooter. "Red, the bridle's off. Hop to it. Here, wait a shake. Hold up yore right hand."

Red, having been duly sworn, crossed one leg over the other and pulled the makings from the upper right-hand pocket of his vest.

"Y'all remember, yore honor an' gents," he began, rolling the paper over the tobacco, "how fifty thousand dollars was stole out of the express office a while ago."

"What's that gotta do with yore turnin' Ben Lenton loose?" struck in Lumley.

"I ain't in the habit o' speakin' twice," warned Dolan.

Lumley spat upon the floor. He said nothing aloud.

"Forty thousand dollars was for the new bank in Paradise Bend," continued Red, dwelling lovingly on the figures, "an' ten thousand was consigned to Lanpher of the 88. My li'l' black hoss was stole at the same time, along with my brother Tom's wagon an' his best team o' mules. We got the wagon an' mules back, but not the hoss—then.

"Li'l' while later I picked up a knife with a busted blade an' a short bit wedged into her between the express office an' the company's corral. I pried out the short bit, an' scratched on her was the initials B. L. The dime was bored near the edge, pocket-piece like. The knife was marked B. L., too."

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Here Red took time to light his cigaret and inhale deeply.

"That same day," he went on, "Old Salt sat down on the bench outside the door of the express office. He leaned his shoulder against the jamb an' snags humself on a piece of a knife-blade stuck in the door-jamb. I told Buck an' he pulled her out with a pair o' pliers. Without Buck noticin', I fitted together the broken blade in the knife I found with the piece from the door-jamb an' they fitted fine. I didn't say nothin' about what I'd found—then."

"Why not?" asked Dolan.

"Wanted to find out more before springin' what I knowed," was Red's not too truthful reply. But it sounded sufficiently plausible.

"Yuh remember, yore honor an' gents, how, when Lanpher tried to put off the robbery on to Ben Lenton, Pickles Dill an' Spunk Lenn backed him up strong. You keep a-rememberin' that. It'll come in handy later.

"I was out at the Lenton place when Lanpher made his break. I'm sort o' recoverin' from that riot when I lost the marked knife an' dime out o' my pocket. Young Sam Brown Calloway picks 'em up. The sheriff hears about it an' comes prancin' out, him an' Kansas, to see whether the knife-blade Buck pulled out o' the office door-jamb fits or not.

"She didn't fit. The busted-off piece was part of a lot bigger knife. Now, yore honor, that piece when Buck pulled her out o' the doorway fitted. When the sheriff tried her at the Lenton ranch house she didn't fit. The knife an' dime belonged to John Hudson, a gent who's wanted down in Lang County. Now, yore honor, I'd like to know why Buck Saylor tried to shield John Hudson by substitutin' a different blade for the piece I found."

"I never did no such thing!" cried Buck Saylor hotly. "That blade——"

"Whatcha so pale for then?" interrupted Red. "You look kind o' sick to me."

"Look here, judge!" shouted Buck Saylor, "if this feller's accusin' me of anythin', I wanna know it. I want him to make a charge against me. This here beatin' round the bush don't go."

"I ain't beatin' round no bushes," contradicted Red. "I'm just statin' facts an' askin' questions, thassall. Lordy, man alive, can't I ask a simple li'l' question without Buck havin' a fit?"

"You've asked yore question," said the justice. "G'on."

"Might's well. Don't look like I was gonna get no answer."

"Yore honor, this ain't got a thing to do with the charge against Red Kane," protested Buck violently. "What he's sayin' is —— foolishness, an' it ain't gettin' nowhere."

"You only think it ain't gettin' nowhere, Buck," returned Red with the greatest good humor in the world. "You don't see the end o' the trail yet, thassall. Lemme go at it my own way. I may be slow, but I'll get there at the finish, an' when I do you'll be with me. Yes, sir, you'll be right along all same wheels on a wagon."

RED laughed loudly and leered at Buck Saylor. The express agent grunted, blew his nose, and coughed. He seemed to have a retching in the throat.

"You see, Buck," pursued the ruthless Mr. Kane, "I'm naturally interested in you. Yo're one o' the gents swore out my warrant. Yo're a fly in the ointment. Feel sticky yet, Buck? Nemmine, you will."

"Stop it, Red," admonished the justice. "Keep a-travellin'."

"I will," nodded Red. "You know how Lumley, Billy Bruff an' Dunc Rouse come up here from Flipup, Colorado, to arrest Ben Lenton for the murder of his brother an' the stealin' o' thirty thousand o' the brother's money. How'd they know he was here, huh? Who told 'em? Yore honor, while I was sick at the Lenton ranch-house, a gent named Hollister stops for a meal there. Three days after that meal Hollister was in Blossom on the railroad sendin' a telegram to Sheriff Tom Lumley at Flipup, Colorado. The telegram says:

Located L at K C ranch-house near Sweetwater Mountain east of Farewell.

"This telegram was signed H."

"Howja find this out?" asked Dolan.

"Operator at Blossom told me. I stopped there a few days ago. Whatsa matter, Lumley? Got a pain or somethin'? Nothin' serious, I hope. Shore, yore honor, right away. Well, sir, them three fellers from Flipup gloms on to Ben Lenton, an' me'n' Tom starts for Flipup to find out the truth about that murder. Ben Lenton wasn't the man to kill his own brother, but

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Sheriff Tom Lumley an' them two deputies, Billy Bruff an' Dunc Rouse, was —— roarers from way back. I'd heard enough about them to be dead shore o' that.

"On our way south one night four riders passed without seein' us. One of 'em's hoss stumbled. He cussed, the man did. It was Hollister's voice. Farther south, over back o' Scatterpine Ridge south o' the Broken Hills, we heard a shot. Li'l' later we seen Buck Saylor comin' through the woods. He didn't see us. Buck looked average nervous. We watched him get his hoss an' ride back out o' the woods to a li'l' bunch o' cottonwoods at a spring. He stops there a shake lookin' at somethin' on the ground. Then he goes on. Bimeby, after he's good an' gone, we go out to the spring. There's Pickles Dill, a .45-90 through an' through him, dead as Julius Cæsar. The front o' Pickles' shirt was all burnt. Whoever had killed him had held pretty close to Pickles. Looked like Pickles hadn't been expectin' it. Looked like Pickles musta been sort o' caught out on a limb."

"It's a lie!" boomed Buck Saylor, pale to his trembling lips.

"Own up, now. Wasn't Pickles the man killed yore bloodhounds? They was took away so's they wouldn't do no barkin' the night o' the robbery, an' rather than be bothered feedin' em' out there at Squaw Draw an' afraid to leave 'em tied 'cause they might break loose an' take up the trail, Pickles downed 'em. Wasn't that the way of it, Buck?"

"You—you can't prove it," stuttered the badly-rattled express agent.

"I don't need to prove that. Yore face is too easy to read. It don't matter none, anyway. She's only a detail. But the murder o' Pickles is a cat with another tail. Me an' Tom can prove that, you bet. An' I can get hold o' Tom any time she's necessary."

"In this territory," pronounced Judge Dolan with heavy emphasis, "they has to be two witnesses or satisfactory circumstantial evidence, or both, before a warrant can be issued on the charge of murder. I'll say right here the evidence so far is a heap satisfactory. Just as soon as this hearin' is over I'll issue a warrant for Buck Saylor. Pendin' the servin' of said warrant, the sheriff will take charge of Buck Saylor's person."

The sheriff left the platform and began to worm his way through the crowd toward Buck Saylor. The latter hesitated till he saw Jake Rule actually start in his direction; then he attempted to escape. He may have covered six inches of the distance to the door. But it is extremely doubtful. It was the gigantic Shorty Rumbold who pinioned his arms to his sides and held him fast, and it was Tom Dowling of the Cross-in-a-box who removed his six-shooter.

The sheriff snapped a pair of handcuffs upon the wrists of the madly protesting express agent, shoved him into the cell so lately vacated by Red Kane and locked the door.

This situation brought to a successful close, Red resumed his tale.

"We searched Pickles," said he, "an' we found in the leg o' one boot two gold watches, in the other boot four hundred an' fifty dollars in gold. We all know Pickles Dill, yore honor. Nobody never seen him work anythin' but his friends, an' he wasn't so lucky at cards. He never bought them gold watches, that's a cinch. We scouted round that camp, Tom an' me, an' we found the tracks of a pair of mighty small boots. Hollister wears small boots. We found the tracks of a hoss packin' a bar shoe on the near fore. Hollister rode a hoss like that. I seen Piney Jackson shoe him with a bar shoe myself.

"This wasn't all we found neither. She ain't five minutes after when my li'l' black hoss—the one stolen out o' Tom's corral the night of the express robbery—my li'l' black hoss, I say, come driftin' out o' the woods close by. An' him an' the hoss o' Pickles Dill was wearin' the same kind o' figure-of-eight hobbles. This sort o' links up Pickles an' Hollister on' the express robbery, yuh can see that easy.

"After that Tom an me went on to Flipup, Colorado. One or two li'l' things happened there had awful rough edges. We pulled through somehow, an' one evenin', when a hotel landlord named Skinner an' us was in the office o' Bradley Usher, who came slidin' in but Hollister an' asks for Brad Usher, who's away at the time. I'm some took myself with Hollister's hair, which was yaller last time I seen it an' black at the roots now. One thing led to another, an' we had to reason with Hollister. Durin' the argument an' while he was senseless, we looked him over, an' they's a knife-scar on his right arm between shoulder an' elbow

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correspondin' to the scar carried by the much-wanted sport John Hudson. Likewise he's packin' in his vest pocket the li'l' carvin' of a Injun girl's head, which same head is a habit with Hudson seemin'ly. Bill Derr's got one Hudson carved an' they was a larger one settin' on Brad Usher's desk. I was gonna bring it, but I couldn't find it when I come away."

"That's a lie," declared Usher coldly, speaking for the first time since the beginning of the hearing. "I never knowed anybody named Hollister or Hudson in my whole life. An' I never had no Injun head layin' round loose on my desk neither. Injun heads!"

"Well, now I forgot," Red hastened to say. "I did find that Injun head after all."

He pulled it from his vest pocket and held it up for all to see. From another pocket he produced a second head.

"Here's the one Hudson had in his own pocket when we caught him," Red hurried on, "an' here's Bill Derr's he just gimme. Yore honor, look 'em over an' say what yuh think."

His honor, after a close inspection, gave it as his opinion that the same hand and knife had carved the three.

"All this don't tangle me anywhere," Usher informed the world at large, "if that's what yo're gettin' at, Mister Man."

"That's what I'm gettin' at," replied Red. "Li'l' by li'l' ties the knot, as the Vigilantes used to say."

LUMLEY and Bruff glanced uneasily at each other. This Territorial court of law was a farce—so far. The Lord knew when it would twist into a tragedy.

"I forgot to say," said Red, "that we found in Hudson's pocket the watch of the governor of this Territory—the one stole from him in the hold-up near town. Here's the watch. They's a inscription inside the case. Lookit, judge, read her off for yourself. So yuh see, yore honor an' gents, here's Hudson gettin' his feet wet an' splashin' Brad Usher at the same time. Yo're shore you don't know a gent named Hudson or Hollister, huh, Usher?"

"No, I don't," was the loudly uttered reply.

"Sheriff, how about now?" queried Red.

Jake Rule nodded and strode to the door of the left-hand cell, which he unlocked. A moment later John Hudson, alias Hollister, disheveled, defiant and sullen, stumbled out upon the platform.

"D'jever see this feller before, Mr. Usher?" called the judge, indicating the prisoner.

"Am I bein' examined?" asked Bradley Usher.

"Not a-tall. I'm just askin' questions. Nothin' reg'lar about this. But you either know this feller or you don't. If you don't answer, you must have a reason for not answerin'. Maybe that reason would be interestin' for to know."

Judge Dolan licked his lips and squinted at Mr. Usher. The latter's face was expressionless. Then—

"I don't know him," said Mr. Usher. "Never seen him in all my life."

"Lemme make you acquainted, then," struck in Red. "This is John Hudson, alias Hollister, the gent who was askin' for yuh that night in yore office at Flipup. You don't know him, an' alla time you was keepin' this here now hydraulic peroxide in stock for him an' usin' one of his Injun girl heads for a paper-weight. You don't know him, huh? An' it don't tangle you anywhere, huh? That's funnier. An' what's comin' next is gonna be funniest.

"Yore honor," went on Red, turning to Judge Dolan, "me an' Tom kept right along tryin' to cut out our own particular cow, an' by-an'-by we got the true story o' what happened at the Empire Mine the day Dick Lenton, Ben Lenton's brother, was murdered.

"Usher, Bruff, Lumley an' Rouse bought the mine for sixty thousand dollars. Usher, Lumley an' Rouse—Bruff didn't go—Hudson an' Art Teller an' Skinner went out to the mine the mornin' after Ben Lenton an' his daughter left. Huh? Shore? This Hudson was a kind o' go-between for Brad Usher an'—an' whatever Brad happened to be interested in round the country. Nobody knowed him in Flipup—he always come in an' juked out in the night—except Usher an' six of his friends. An', speakin' o' friends, we found out that Hudson knowed Rum Durkin an' Spunk Lenn back east in Chadron, Nebraska, where they all three broke jail together just in time to miss bein' lynched for hoss-stealin'. Where was I at? Oh, yeah. Usher an' five of his friends went out to the mine, an' they got there early, an' they's nobody there but

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Dick Lenton an' he's drunk. He showed 'em the money where she's hid in the stove, an' between 'em they figured to rub him out, take the thirty thousand, put all the blame on Ben Lenton an' get his thirty thousand too.

"They drawed lots to see who'd do the shootin', an' Hudson lost. He gave Dick Lenton both barrels o' Dick's own shotgun, but he didn't quite finish him; so Brad Usher an' Tom Lumley pulled their six-shooters an' Dick died right quick."

Red sprang to his feet and pointed at Lumley.

"Look at him, yore honor!" he shouted. "Don't he look like a guilty man?"

Lumley, beside himself with badly mixed emotions, volleyed back his denials, general and particular.

"You think I can't prove it?" interrupted Red at the top of his lungs. "Look!"

Red half turned as he spoke and jerked a thumb toward the open window behind him. Framed in the window appeared the handcuffed form of Art Teller, Kansas Casey in close attendance.

"He's a liar!" shrieked Tom Lumley. "I never fired a shot. It was Hudson an' Usher who killed Dick Lenton! I—I tried to stop 'em! I tell yuh I didn't have a thing to do with it!"

Instantly, led by Bill Derr and the 88 boys, a rush of men bore Lumley and Bruff to the floor, where they were sat upon and deprived of their weapons.

It was then that John Hudson, with a sudden roar of rage, sprang from the platform and strove to brain Tom Lumley with his handcuffs. But Bill Derr was a watchful person, particularly so at that moment, and Lumley escaped with the mere trifle of a gashed cheek.

Toward the rear of the room Telescope Laguerre was pressing the muzzle of a six-shooter against the small of Bradley Usher's back.

"Don' you move," Telescope was saying. "You keep you hand up or I blow you een half mebbeso. W'ere dat —— gun, *hein*? I fin' it, me. Now walk slow up front de room. Move!"

"Look here, judge," said Usher when he had been forced to the platform, "you can't hold us for a crime alleged to have been committed in another State. I want a lawyer."

"We ain't got a lawyer in town," said Judge Dolan. "So that's all right. An' I'll hold yuh as vagabonds till Colorado gets out the warrants for yuh. So that's all right, too."

"You ain't got nothin' against me," spoke up Billy Bruff desperately. "Even if you hold these other fellers, I ain't in it with them. Kane here said I didn't go out to the mine that mornin'. Holdin' me is a heap illegal."

"Yeah," said Red. "You think so. Wait till yore shaved o' that beard an' see if Piney Jackson don't recognize yuh. He was a horse-shoer in yore regiment when it was stationed at Fort Rackham, where Miss Lenton said you deserted after the post-trader's killin', you bein' at the time a sergeant named Reynolds. Yeah, Piney Jackson, he's the blacksmith here in Farewell. You've seen him—he's right yonder now—an' I guess you must know him by the way yore eyes are battin'. We'll just see if he knows you."

"Whatsa use waitin' to shave him?" objected Piney. "I got my hoss-clippers right in my pocket."

BILLY BRUFF was not kept waiting. Ten minutes later he was identified as the Army deserter Reynolds, the man suspected of having murdered the post-trader, by the willing Piney.

"I guess that settles you," said Judge Dolan in a loud voice. "Sheriff, app'int some deputies an' take all these prisoners down to the express office. I wanna do some investigatin'. No, nemmine Red Kane. He ain't no prisoner. I ain't even askin' him to deny the charge against him. 'Tain't necessary, since he's showed up the fellers who swore out the warrants the way he has. Affidavits an' warrants swore to an' swore out by murderers, road-agents an' Army deserters don't travel a foot in this court, an' the warrants against Red Kane, his brother Tom, an' Miss Dorothy Lenton are hereby quashed. Sheriff, go right along with yore duty."

"You Teller!" Hudson, grinding his handcuffs together in the ecstasy of his rage, snarled through clenched teeth. "I'll get you before I die, an' get you a-plenty, you lousy snitch!"

The manacled gentleman at the open window tilted his wizened face on one side and surveyed the glaring Hudson with contempt.

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"Don't lemme see you first," was his sole remark.

"Aw, you needn't be bad friends with Art Teller, Hudson," deprecated Red. "Outside o' bein' a murderer he's all right. He ain't no snitch. But I knowed he knowed all about this business, an' I just lied a li'l' bit when he showed up there at the window so fine and providential. Naw, you gotta blame Lumley for bein' took in an' blattin' out thataway, an' likewise Skinner for confessin', besides the shotgun you killed Dick Lenton with for leadin' us straight to Skinner after we'd lost him. Yep, the shotgun with Dick Lenton's initials cut into the small o' the stock. You'd oughta destroyed that shotgun instead o' givin' it to Bill Doran to play with. That was careless."

Hudson burst into a flood of vile and filthy oaths. He continued to swear as the impatient sheriff propelled him toward the door.

Noisily the crowd and the prisoners trooped from the building. Oddly enough, the sheriff did not take the captives to the express-office. He locked them up in Judge Dolan's warehouse and set three men on guard. Which being done, the sheriff joined Red Kane, Judge Dolan, Bill Derr and other prominent personages at the bar of the Happy Heart.

An hour later Red, the judge, Derr and the sheriff returned to the jail. Jake Rule unlocked the door of Buck Saylor's cell.

"Lookit here," said Red roughly, confronting Buck Saylor. "Them other fellers say you kept back half o' that fifty thousand for yore share. What did you do with it?"

"Half!" almost screamed the overwrought express agent. "Half! Ten thousand was all I got. They—my Gawd—I—What you talkin' about? I don't know nothin' about it, I tell you."

"I guess you've said enough," nodded Red. "Have I done my part o' the bargain satisfactory, sheriff?"

"Which I should say so!" was the hearty response. "I'll send word down to Flipup right away, an' the old man can come home any time."

From the jail Red went directly to the sheriff's house. Plump Mrs. Rule, wiping her hands on her apron, said in response to his inquiry that Miss Lenton had departed homeward.

"Jake sent Kansas to tell her the warrant was squashed," Mrs. Rule told him, "an' Dot, she left immediate. A real nice girl, that one. I declare I was glad to have her, so handy an' neat an' obligin'. Know her well, Mr. Kane?"

"Not very well. Didn't she leave no message for me?"

"Nary a word."

Mrs. Rule folded her arms across her substantial bosom and beamed upon him fatuously.

"No word—nothin' a-tall?" Incredulously.

The sheriff's wife shook her tight, slick coiffure. Red took his instant leave without even a nod for politeness.

Dot gone without a word! He couldn't understand it. She must have known he was in town. Kansas would have told her, or Mrs. Rule, or even Jake himself. What did it mean? Was it the wrong answer after all?

There was only one way to find out—follow. He went to Tom's corral, whither his horse had been taken, caught up the animal and hurriedly cinched on the hull.

But he did not immediately head toward the ranch-house at Sweetwater Mountain. Instead, he rode north along the Bend trail a short two miles. Below a swaybacked ridge he halted, dragged out his six-shooter and fired five shots. He was engaged in the process of reloading when Tom Kane loped out of an adjacent draw.

"It's all right," said Red listlessly. "I—we won, an' the warrants are squashed."

"Oh, you won," said Tom. "Yo're welcome to the credit. You worked hard enough for it. Say, I seen Rooster Cox larrupin' along about two hours ago. He was headin' north. I didn't stop him."

Red nodded.

"I didn't see him at the hearin'," he said. "He musta smelt a mice some'ers. Can't prove nothin' against him, but I expect he ain't so sure about that himself."

"I expect he ain't," chuckled Tom. "An' that'll be the last of him an' his outfit round here, anyway. Whatcha lookin' so sad for, huh?"

"Who? Me? Me sad? Why——"

"Yeah, you. Which yore face is as long as a well-rope. An' look— Say, has she give yuh the *klatawah?* Has she? Did she turn yuh down, huh? Did she?" The liveliest hope was depicted upon the countenance of Tom Kane.

"If I only had a button, I could fasten

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that grin o' yores right behind yore ears," said Red, forcing a hard smile. "You look like a catfish."

"I'll bet she's gave yuh the mitten," persisted Tom, "an' serve yuh good an' right for bein' a fool. Yo're well out of it. Just lookit what's happened because you went an' fell in love with that nester's girl! Just lookit all the trouble we horned into! You an' I was lucky not to be lynched. An' all on account o' her an' her black eyes! I tell yuh, bad luck with a big B. Yo're well out of it, yuh betcha."

"I ain't asked her yet," Red said dully, "if yuh gotta know. I'm ridin' out to the K C now."

"You are! Well, if you can't see the quicksand after all that's happened, ride into it, cowboy, ride into it —— bent! I give up. I ain't got a word to say. Not a word. I've done scratched my head till she's raw, tryin' to figger some way o' gittin' you out o' this. I spent one whole afternoon the day I come to see you at the K C a-settin' on a rock a-wrastlin' an' a-puzzlin' to snoozle out a path for yuh—I've shore studied a heap, an' it ain't done a bit o' good. I've talked till I'm dry as a covered bridge an' yo're still as sheep-foolish as ever. You'll wish you hadn't, you hear me warblin'! An' a year from now you'll be fightin' like wolves."

Red laid a long finger alongside his nose.

"Har!" said he. "An' again har, har! An' three times har, har, har! Which bein' translated into words o' one syllable means the more I see of you the better I like myself. Now you drift along into Farewell, Tommy, old settler, an' get yore freightin' business a-goin' again. If I'm gonna be yore partner, I'm all for activity an' makin' money an'-pushin' the bridge over generally. So long."

With a loud whoop Red smacked his hat across the astonished eyes of Tom's pony, wheeled his horse in a quarter-circle and galloped off eastward.

Tom, when he had his mount again under control, looked at Red vanishing down the draw and added a few chosen words to those he had been passionately uttering during the gyrations of his pony. Then he smiled sourly and rolled him a cigaret.

"Alla same," he said aloud in the general direction of his horse's ears, "alla same, he's one good worker. An' she won't spoil that."

WHEN Red reached the ranch-house under Sweetwater the kitchen door stood wide open and from the chimney pennoned a wisp of smoke.

He dismounted heavily, dropped the reins over his horse's head and walked slowly to the doorway. He stood there, his hat in his hand, looking in. No one was in the room, but a pot of coffee, roosting low on the fire, protruded six inches above lid-level. The kitchen table was set for two. He looked long at that table and shifted his feet and passed a hand across the back of his head.

"You—you might as well come in."

It was Dot Lenton speaking from the doorway of the inner room.

He stepped over the sill, wondering why she should boggle her invitation. It wasn't like her. She was a direct sort of person. He looked at her standing there, at the fugitive smile that left her red mouth grave, at the dark eyes deep as the wells of night, and his heart hopped right up into his mouth and stayed there, fighting for existence with his Adam's apple. But all he could think of to say was—

"You didn't leave me no word."

The fugitive smile returned on the instant.

"Was it so necessary?" she asked softly, and a slow flush reddened the tan of throat and cheeks.

At once that old K C kitchen underwent a most marvelous change. There were birds there, scores of them, and they were all singing as if their little lungs would burst. And there was a light too, a wonderful golden light that filled every nook and cranny.

Red dropped his hat on the floor and drew a long breath.

"Have you found out yet?" he asked, his eyes on hers.

"Wait," she said and came forward into the kitchen.

Her *cantina* hung over a chair-back. She jerked open the flap, inserted her hand and pulled out a flat, limp package wrapped in a newspaper and tied with the blue string affected by the Blue Pigeon store. She laid this package on the table between the places she had set.

"Red," she said, facing him across the table, "before I answer your question I want to—to tut—tell you somethin' and show you somethin'. I—I was a beast, Red, when I said what I did."

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"Huh?"

He gaped at her. A beast! What was the girl talking about? A pucker of alarm creased his forehead.

"A beast," she repeated, "a nasty, little, swell-headed, self-sufficient little beast."

Red stared at her helplessly. She seemed sane enough, but what was she talking about?

With a snap of the thumb she broke the blue string that bound the package. She snicked open the newspaper and revealed a brand-new shirt of gray flannel plentifully besprinkled with aggressive purple horse-shoes. On top of the shirt lay a folded silk handkerchief of a strikingly vivid green. He regarded the shirt. He regarded the handkerchief. Then he looked at her. Still he did not understand.

"Red," she said, meeting his gaze bravely, "I spoiled your gray shirt when I washed it, and the horse-shoes all ran and faded out, and I took away your green handkerchief, and I—I said things to you about them—things I shouldn't have said about what didn't matter, anyway. So here's another gray shirt, Red, like your old one, and another handkerchief like the one I took. I—I think they're the—the shirt's the right size. Mr. Flynn said it was, and he ordered it special from Piegan City. I—I think a green handkerchief tied round the neck of a gray shirt with purple horse-shoes mum-makes the most bub-beautiful combination in the world, and very becomin' to a man with red hair."

And then the table was no longer between them.

"I THINK the coffee's scorchin'?" Dot Lenton stirred briefly and sniffed the air.

"Is it? What do you care?"

"I don't—much." Comfortably.

"MY GOODNESS, Red, look at the sun. We—we've been sittin' here all afternoon."

"You just notice it? I s'pose we'd oughta be goin'. Dolan goes to bed early, an' we don't wanna roust him out too late."

"Dolan?"

"Shore, Dolan, the judge. He marries folks. He's gonna marry you an' me. Now, that's all right. I'm doin' this. Day after tomorrow's the twentieth. I gotta go down to Triangle Mountain to light that smoke for yore dad, ain't I? You don't think I'm goin' alone, do yuh? Well, then."

THE END

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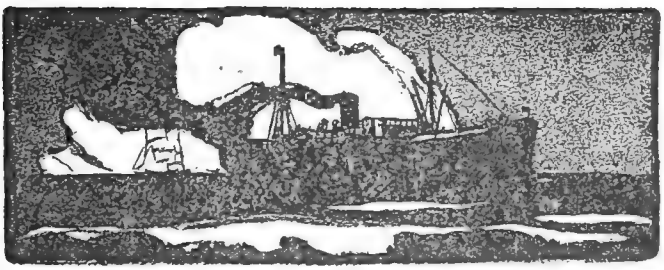

UNCHARTED

by HENRY LEVERAGE

THE surgeons of the debarkation hospital at Staten Island were seven months and more changing Lothair into the semblance of a man, but they allowed him to go soon after his last chest wound had healed. The nurse's report was an epic of latter-day surgery.

Lothair walked from the Battery to Sullivan Street. He spread his huge limbs under a table in the back room of Bertolia's and called loudly for red wine. The dive was filled with seamen and crimps.

He drank more than ten navvies. He grew more berserker on the third night of his sojourn. He roundly cursed the flash women and their carmined lips. Bertolia smiled the slow smile of Italy. Lothair, despite his struggles, was thrown to the sidewalk.

It took eight men to hold him from the Italian proprietor. Bertolia was mildly interested when Lothair pounded on his chest in the manner of a mad ape.

"I dank I get you!" promised the seaman through the thicket of detaining arms.

"Go 'way," said Bertolia. "Go to that woman you speak me once about."

Lothair widened his blue eyes and staggered along Sullivan Street.

Damp sea air came to his nostrils. It sobered him. He reached a water-front street. He sat down on the string-piece of a pier. He stared unseeingly at the flowing Hudson.

The gut-sewed wounds in his chest ached. The Florina wine left its bitter lees. His pockets sagged, for there was no money in any of them. He had the sea for a calling.

Big-eyed Hilda, the nurse in the debarkation hospital, gilded all of his thoughts. She it was who had been lightly mentioned by Bertolia—the smiling Italian.

Hilda lived——?

Lothair searched his pockets for her address. He found it upon a scrap of paper. His chest ached suddenly. It was the giant heart within him that throbbed. He rose and set about to find the nurse. Seven months' attention and sterilizing and flushing open wounds had brought him close to Hilda. He wanted her. His was a nature to seek his desire.

Her house was near by. Lothair lumbered around a corner upon which showed a bock beer sign. He peered at the transoms of brownstone fronts.

Children stared at the huge seaman. They sucked their thumbs and watched him seeking the number. He found it and went up a flight of stone steps like a boatswain climbing a quarter-deck. He struck a sulfur match and studied the mail-boxes. Not finding the name he wanted, he jabbed every button.

A surly beef and beer face suddenly appeared in an open doorway. Lothair fingered the burnt match and stared at the apparition.

"I want to see Hilda Goodwin," he muttered. "I dank I do."

"She's gone to England—steerage," rasped a voice. "She went today, Dane."

"What ship?"

"The *Bermudian*, Dane."

Lothair dropped the burnt match and went back to the docks. He watched the lights of the Jersey shore until midnight.

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He rose then and sought for a crimp he knew who could ship him to sea. The crimp lived near Bertolia's.

"I want to go on the *Bermudian*," he told this crimp.

"She's a bad ship, Dane."

"I dank I go on her just the same."

"Meet me at Hoboken—the Garten Inn—tomorrow. I'll get you on the *Bermudian*."

Lothair drew no advance money. He signed in the presence of a consular representative and the captain of the *Bermudian*. Seven deep-sea rats signed after him. They were rowed out to the *Bermudian* which lay off Tompkinsville. That same night she steamed through the Narrows, dropped her pilot and started clamping over the Western Ocean.

The forecastle of the ship was forward of the steerage. A thin bulkhead separated the two compartments. The food served to the crew was the same as that served to the one hundred and twelve passengers in the steerage. The cries of the seasick and the infants could plainly be heard by Lothair and his mates.

He had no time for retrospection during the first watches of the passage. The boatswains of the *Bermudian* were hard-fisted and surly. There was much to do upon the ship. The cargo had been badly loaded. Then there was the call for helmsmen which Lothair answered. He showed the second mate—a blear-eyed Cockney—his discharge papers. One was from the American Shipping Board. It testified that he had received honorable wounds while performing his duty during the last days of the U-boat warfare.

The mate passed the papers back to Lothair.

"What the —— did you do so great?" he asked.

"I dank I stop plenty shrapnel. My chest was full of little pieces. They cut some out—back there."

Lothair turned at the foot of the bridge-ladder and pointed over the port quarter of the ship.

"Back there—back there——"

"Take the wheel!" snapped the mate. "It's your trick next and Gawd 'elp you if you're lyin' to me!"

Lothair obtained the course from the wheelman. He repeated it as he grasped the spokes and peered at the shaded binnacle. He saw an officer's shadow through the wheel-house window. He tried his best and held the point—even to the end of the two hour trick. He heard, as he slouched forward along the lee rail, a mate say to another:

"Give me a Dane every time. That fellow never let her swing."

Lothair turned at the booby-hatch. He stared across the deck to the companion that covered the entrance to the steerage. Over it loomed a samson-post. Above the post showed the squat funnel of the ship, capped with fire like a fat cigar.

A hissing comber parted at the ship's stem. It curled the rails in twin mounds of green. It lifted the bow. The ship steadied, lurched and started down into the hollow place before the short jib-boom. Cries sounded from the steerage companion. The ventilators filled with groans.

"I dank my Hilda be sick," said Lothair. "I see her tomorrow and tell her she must marry me."

He descended to the forecastle. He turned and stared at a swinging lamp. Beneath this lamp five of the sea-scum squatted, playing cards. They ignored him. He climbed into a fore-and-aft bunk.

THE ship wallowed on. She was an ancient vessel drawn from the southern routes. Rats swarmed her holds. Her seams leaked. The single-bridge and pilot house contained but one compass. The engines were loose-coupled and noisy.

Lothair slept out his watch and came on deck at daybreak. A harrow of criss-crossed waters marked the green Atlantic. Smudge showed before the plunging bow of the *Bermudian*. A fog draped over Newfoundland. Luggers and trawlers dotted the Grand Banks. Through these the overladen vessel passed, as the watches followed each other, and some of the steerage passengers found their sea legs.

Hilda appeared on deck at nightfall. Lothair, smoking a pipe at the break of the fore-peak, sighted her. He stared aft. He watched the English nurse sway giddily. He saw her grasp a ventilator stay and gaze pathetically forward.

He was at her side in a minute.

"I came with you," he said thickly. "I watch over you. They tell me back there—over there—you go away. I, too, go away."

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The Dane supported the shrinking woman with one arm as he pointed where America lay. He felt her heart throb against his breast. She tried to break away from him. He laughed with salty vigor.

They swayed with the motion of the waves. He towered a full foot over her. Her eyes were huge ports through which showed her resentment at his behavior. Her lips were greenish from the sickness of the sea. A wan color was on her thin neck. She started to cry as he hugged her to him.

"Don't cry, Hilda," he said. "It is Lothair who is with you. I keep you always."

"Go away! Go away you brute! I'll call the captain."

Lothair relaxed his hold. He rubbed his chest with the flat of his right hand. There was a double ache there—one from the shrapnel wounds and the other from his heart.

"I watch over you," he said. "You watch over me once—six—seven months. I don't forget that."

Hilda raised her arms and attempted to adjust her tam o' shanter. She drew down her ruffled waist. She backed from the Dane, turned, swayed and crossed the canted deck for the steerage companion. Down this she climbed without a smile for Lothair. He braced his huge legs and shelved his shoulders forward.

He was in this position when the Cockney mate found him.

"Say, Dane," asked the officer, "how long were you at the wheel?"

"One trick, sir."

"Who gave you the course?"

"I dank it was a Portigee. He look like a Portigee."

"Lisbon Sam?"

"I dank it was, sir."

"What was the course? D'ye remember it?"

"Nor'east, a quarter east, sir."

"That's right! Did you give that course to your relief?"

"I did, sir!"

The overworked Cockney mate scratched his head.

"There's bloody —— to pay," he said. "The old man says we were all over the ocean last night. We were thirty miles to the south'ard of our right position at noon. Look out for that steerin', Dane."

Lothair stared at the mate who went aft gliding swiftly over the wet planks of the fore-peak. He climbed the bridge-ladder and loomed—a speck—over the canvas wind-break. Now and then he turned and glanced through the pilot-house window where stood a deep-sea rat hanging on to the spokes of the ancient wheel.

"I dank that mate be crazy," concluded Lothair turning to the forecastle. "I steer him straight—by the course."

Fog descended upon the Western Ocean and blotted out all view of the sky. Through the pall the *Bermudian* wallowed at half speed. Trick followed trick at the wheel. Lothair took his turn and was overly careful to please the mates. He watched the point, which had been shifted along the great circle route, like an apprentice seaman taking an examination. He thought now and then of Hilda. She had not appeared on deck.

The Cockney mate, whose name was Hargraves—Mr. Hargraves—was responsible for a great many things. The captain was seldom seen by the foremast hands. Music, light laughter and the phantom forms of lovely women attracted him aft where the second cabin and first cabin passengers walked.

Mr. Hargraves had no such sinecure. The cranky ship, the varying compass, the green crew and surly boatswains demanded all of his attention. Also there were many sick in the steerage. He went below at each watch. He found his labors lightened by the nurse, Hilda, who had taken charge of the patients. She feared the deck because Lothair was there. She found work enough below to occupy her mind.

Hargraves, who was married and had three children at Great Grimsby, heard Hilda's story concerning the bear-like love-making of the Dane. He promised to put him in the chain-locker if he persisted in annoying her.

"Don't do that," said Hilda. "I'll stay down here out of his way. Poor man—he was seven months on one cot. Perhaps it turned his brain."

Hargraves went on deck. He sent down medicine to Hilda. His mind, then, was changed to other things than an amorous Dane and a white-faced nurse. The *Bermudian's* wireless reported ice ahead.

A day passed with the laden ship groping through a smoky sea where no bells rang

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or sirens blowed. Soundings were impossible. They were beyond the Grand Banks. The rock-bound coast of Newfoundland was well astern.

The overworked second mate stood the bridge and stared straight ahead for some signs of the ice. A boatswain watched the thermometers—one in the sea and the other in the wheel-house alongside the barometer. Aft, and almost in another world, the first-cabin passengers strolled upon the three decks or reclined in chairs.

Lothair knew that the *Bermudian* was in danger. The owners had demanded a nine-day passage. The Summer route was infested with great bergs. Reports gave the locality of a number of these. Ships, unseen, sent warning messages. No man on board knew the *Bermudian's* position. The sky had been covered for a night and a day.

THE Dane left a trick at the wheel and climbed to the fore-deck. He hesitated between the open companionway to the steerage and the booby-hatch near the break of the fore-peak. He stared up at the mate on the bridge. He swung, braced his trunk-like legs, and widened his eyes as he attempted to pierce the fog. He felt, against his unshaven cheeks, the icy air that told of floes and bergs somewhere ahead.

Going down the steerage ladder backward, he searched through the gloom for Hilda. He found her sitting on the edge of a bunk in which lay a mother and a gasping infant. Now and then, as Lothair watched, he saw Hilda press ice to the infant's brow. He heard the mother's thin voice. He wondered at the miracle of love and service shown there. He attempted to move away, but the ship lurched. Hilda glanced up. She dropped from the edge of the bunk and stood with her hands on her flat hips.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

Lothair bunched his faded cap in his fists. He dropped his blue-eyed stare to the deck.

"I came down to help you," he said. "I dank I can help—a little. I can get ice. The cook, he give me some."

Hilda turned to the mother and infant. Her glance wandered along the rows of bunks. In some of these sea-sick immigrants lay—too weak to aid themselves.

The ship's doctor came an hour later. He wondered at the nurse's assistant who clumsily did her bidding. Lothair and his shambling gait reminded the doctor of a blacksmith trying to serve tea.

"He's faithful," admitted Hilda. "He'll never amount to anything in this world, but he does what I tell him to. He used to obey my orders in the debarkation hospital. He was our prize patient. There's been a lot written in the medical journals about his case. He was almost cut in two by shrapnel."

"He is as big as any two men," admitted the ship's doctor.

Lothair faced Hilda after the doctor had climbed through the deck.

"I heard you say I'm no good!" he blurted. "I marry you and then you make me good. I be somebody!"

Hilda frowned.

"Go on deck," she said. "We're all done now. You can come back tomorrow."

"You marry me when we get ashore? I know a place I can find work."

"I'll never marry you!"

The Dane uncoiled his fingers. He shelved his shoulders toward the girl. She was thin and frail. He feared to crush her.

"I load big ships," he promised. "We have a home."

"Never—with you!"

"I kill you then!"

Hilda lifted on tiptoes.

"Go away, please," she said wanly. "You bother me. I can't live with a man I have no respect for. You got drunk when you left the hospital. I waited for you. That's why I gave you the address. But now—I don't ever want to see you again."

"I'll quit the drink."

"I don't care. I want a man who is somebody—who has done things—whom I can respect."

"I'll be a captain some day."

"Go on deck, please."

The Dane climbed to the deck.

"I dank I like her just the same," he said after long thought in the forecastle where he reclined on the fore-and-aft bunk.

DANGER called him from his sleep. The second mate shouted for all hands on deck. A hoarse siren blared. Ice, in the shape of scattered floes, grated beneath the stem of the ship. More ice was expected.

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An actinic fog-piercer showed a useless spot over the ship's plunging bow. The skipper, in gold braid, peered with squinting eyes from the shelter of the canvas wind-break on the bridge.

Lothair squared his broad shoulders, pulled down his cap and studied the sea. He sensed with Norseman's instinct the presence of an island of ice.

The Cockney mate was for reducing speed. The old man shook his head. Lothair heard them talking on the bridge.

He saw Hilda carrying the sick infant. The nurse crouched in the shelter of a starboard ventilator. He went to her.

"I 'dank there's no danger," he said simply.

Hilda did not answer. She cuddled the infant. Her big eyes were on the curtain of fog.

Two seamen ducked their heads below the canvas strip. The heads reappeared.

"The wireless from *Dublin Castle* reports the bergs north of where we are. We'll clear—with an ocean to spare. Set the new course—east by north—Mr. Hargraves."

"East b' north," repeated the second mate. "East b' north, and 'old 'er there!"

"And see that there's a good man at the wheel!" added the captain. "Put the best man you've got."

Hargraves peered down at the deck. He swept the knot of sea-scum.

"Come up here, Dane!" he snapped. "Take the wheel!"

Lothair's eyes shone as he passed Hilda and the silent infant.

"You see," he said.

She followed him with her glance. His hands clutched the rail of the ladder. He was up and on the towering bridge like a great gorilla.

One hour—two hours passed.

The skipper rolled aft to the first cabin. The first mate and the Cockney stood watch. Now and then they peered through the windows of the wheel-house where Lothair held the course on the point.

The fog thickened to pea-soup impenetrability. The ship's speed was over twelve knots. She plowed through the mist and took the chance that her course was south of the reported icebergs. No woman or child or man aboard attempted to sleep.

It was for this reason that they all heard the hoarse bulling of the skipper.

He had checked the course given to Lothair by the telltale compass which ornamented the deck above his mahogany sea-bed.

This compass, in the captain's cabin aft the chart-house, showed east by south instead of east by north—a variation of two full points. The astonished captain vented his rage for a second time, then charged for the wheel-house and the two mates who held the watch.

He catapulted among them, pointed a wild arm out over the sea, glared through the wheel-house window at Lothair, then went for the Dane.

The foggy air grew lurid with snarling oaths. Mr. Hargraves, somewhat astonished, followed the skipper into the wheel-house. The compass-point remained east by north. The captain's eyes bulged.

"By ——!" he shouted. "Look! That Dane has swung her right again. What do you mean, you —— —— squarehead?" The skipper glared from Lothair to the shaded binnacle, then back again.

Lothair leaned over the wheel. He was far too intent on his duty to answer the dancing skipper.

"Mr. Hargraves!" The captain's voice was accusing.

"Yes, sir."

"Have you been watching this man?"

"I 'ave, sir. 'E's 'eld 'er very steady on east b' north. 'E 'asn't let 'er swing an eighth point."

The old man rubbed his eyes. He glanced up and through the wheel-house window. Vast and towering fog was before the ship's plunging bow. Also, there was a chill of ice in the air.

"It's very strange," snarled the captain. "Go into my cabin, Mr. Hargraves, and give me the reading of my compass. We'll check it with the ship's instrument."

LOTHAIR dared hardly breathe. He felt the skipper's breath over his shoulder. He knew that accusing eyes were boring through the back of his head.

Mr. Hargraves glided into the wheel-house. He attempted to speak and choked. He pointed a swaying finger toward the binnacle. He leaned over the spokes and stared at the card.

"Gawd strike me dead!"

"What is it?" asked the boiling skipper.

"Your compass is hoff! Hit's two points

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different than this one. We're runnin' way south of our latitude—or we're hon the course you gave, and your private compass is all wrong. Which is hit?"

The mate cocked an ear and listened. He stiffened as a cry rose from the forepeak. Distress signals went along both rails. The lookouts shouted:

"Ice! Ice ahead! Ice on the port bow!"

Lothair, without the skipper's orders, twirled the spokes of the steering wheel. The steam steering-gear worked slowly. Floe ice and scattered small bergs were under the fast-driving stem.

"Port! Hard-a-port!" bulled the skipper.

"Ah ported her, sir," said Lothair.

"Put her port! My ——"

The skipper's cry was repeated. The steerage passengers threw themselves on the deck. The after passengers ran from the starboard rail to the port. They stared at a towering pinnacle of ice. More ice showed in fantastic formation through the opal fog. A crystalline mountain was grazed by the narrowest of margins. The *Bermudian* staggered, swung and lunged due south. Lothair steadied the wheel.

" 'Old 'er there!" cried the Cockney mate as he sprang outside.

A bell clanged in the engine room. The fast-driven single screw ceased thrashing the water. A rift showed in the fog. Through it all eyes saw the danger they had escaped. An island of ice and cemented bergs reached into the misty distance of the north.

Mr. Hargraves had signaled to stop the engines. He stepped through the wheelhouse door and mopped his brow with his sleeve. He stared at the captain's trembling lips.

"We've escaped," he said brokenly. "Was it because we were off the course?"

"My compass showed we were heading east by south. This compass showed east by north. Whatever was wrong saved us, Mr. Hargraves. We would have been completely crushed had we been running on a true course. Two points south allowed us to clear the icebergs."

"It was an act of God."

"Or metal—iron—near this compass."

The mate pressed Lothair aside.

"Did you see the compass swing?" he gasped.

The captain of the *Bermudian* stared accusingly at Lothair.

"Take off your coat," he ordered. "You've got some iron in your pockets."

"I dank I got nothing," Lothair said as he stripped himself to his bulging muscles.

The skipper picked up the Dane's jacket. He felt of the pockets and the seams. He stared from the mate to the compass-card.

"Come here," he said to Lothair. "Stand at this wheel."

The mate watched the compass. A seeming miracle happened. The needles of the compass swung to starboard as Lothair leaned over the wheel. The deviation from the true point was at least twenty degrees.

"The man is magnetic!" cried the Cockney. "See 'is chest! It's all seamed with scars."

"What have you got inside you?" asked the skipper.

"I dank I got some shrapnel pieces. The surgeons, they did not cut them all out."

Mr. Hargraves and the skipper had known of sheath-knives that attracted a ship's compass and caused a catastrophe. This, however, was their first experience in saving a ship by a false compass-point.

"Go forward!" said the captain to Lothair. "Don't ever try to steer a ship. Why, man, you're a living lodestone!"

The Dane put on his shirt and pea-jacket. He stumbled toward the wheelhouse door on the leeward side.

"I dank I'm no good for anything," he said.

"To —— you ain't!" exclaimed the Cockney mate. "You saved this ship! I'll see the owners myself, if the old man don't. You'll get a good job—ashore."

Lothair found Hilda by a starboard ventilator. Her eyes were shining.

"You were a man, after all," she said. "They say you saw the ice and changed the course without orders."

Lothair started to explain.

"There's something in my chest——"

"Oh, yes, I know."

"I must tell you about it, Hilda."

"Oh, you poor man! It's your heart! Well, I'll let you know when we reach England. I haven't fully made up my mind to marry you—but——"

Lothair had seized the nurse with hungry arms before she could finish her words.

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Silver Sycees

by ROBERT J. PEARSALL

Author of "Fair Loot," "The Eight Vultures of Kwang-Ho," etc.

JUST why Chang Pei Ying hoped that we two aliens could save him from the complexity of his troubles was hard to determine. Perhaps some knowledge of our little exploit at Kwang-Ho had leaked through to him, as things will in China, or perhaps we were the only chance that his desperation suggested to him. The week we'd spent in Cheyung had made us quite well acquainted with the likeable, old-fashioned mandarin whom we believed to be as honest as he was evidently poor; we'd even clasped hands in the Chinese pledge of friendship, so he had grounds for believing we would help him if we could.

Anyway, his urgent, though vague, summons reached us at Pei-fu and impelled us to a three-days' forced journey cross-country by Peking carts, which are really but boxes set on wheels. Most of the way we walked for comfort's sake; and so we reached Cheyung in the early darkness of the third evening, stumbling along over the deeply worn road through a shadowy collection of grave mounds outside the wall.

"Now, if it was the 'verra godly' MacDonald that needed help—" pondered Hazard as we neared the same gate through which we had departed from Cheyung two months before.

Recalling the zealous and rather fiery tempered missionary and the invasion of Taoism that had seemed to threaten the town then, I agreed that in that case our summons wouldn't be hard to understand.

"At that, I've a feeling he'll be mixed up in it," continued Hazard, to whom the scent of a mystery was as the scent of a hare to a good hound, and who had busied his mind with conjectures all the way from Pei-fu.

"It might well be," I agreed again. "Just now I admit the comforts of Chang Pei Ying's *cheng fang* is interesting me most."

And then, the road narrowing into a mere rut, we fell behind our two carts and followed them through the gate, which had been opened without parley by reason of the fact that we'd sent a *mafu* ahead to acquaint the magistrate of our approach. The gatekeeper, a dark blotch against the heavy wooden door, *ke'towed* low as we passed him.

The wall was behind us, but we weren't as yet quite in the town proper. Between us and the nearest of the crowded, cluttered, mud-walled houses there lay a stretch of vegetable patches bisected by the road we were following.

The main street of Cheyung was straight ahead, zigzaggedly outlined by many

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colored Chinese lanterns. These candles diminished in number to right and left of the market district, but a dim radiance came even from the outer and poorest sections—a symptom of continued prosperity that was good to see. People that are hard pressed for *chi'en* burn no more tallow than they can hlep; and, be it said incidentally, a well-lighted Chinese village is proverbially governed by a good magistrate.

"No wonder," said Hazard, "the Taoist mummers are coming to Cheyung—or rather," he corrected himself, "it's no wonder they have come."

I noticed the evidence of their presence at the same moment—the brilliant illumination of that temple which had been vacant and dark of nights when we saw it last. It stood perhaps two hundred yards to the left of the road we were traversing, just on the edge of town. It was called the Temple of the Hundred Steps and had been built perhaps a thousand years ago, when the Taoist faith was purer; but with the gradual dying-out of the old faith it had been abandoned and had so remained for some centuries. Hazard and I had already picked it, however, as the only probable local home of the modern charlatanry that was spreading eastward from Kansu.

That is, Taoism would be located there if MacDonald's efforts to prevent it failed. When we had last seen the missionary who had his own little church and school compound in the northern section of Cheyung, he was trying to rent the temple in anticipation of the Taoists. Chang Pei Ying, in whose hands the rental lay, owing to long nonpayment of the land tax, had shrewdly put him off. Loyalty to the city treasury evidently prompted him to discover whether or not the purse of the hierarchy would prove larger than that of the lonely Christian.

The high-pitched, powerful-voiced chanting, like a weird incantation, that we were beginning to hear, seemed to prove that the magistrate had been repaid for his waiting.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "we might cut across that way. It's nearly on our road. I'd like to see what particular sort of wind-and-water magic the Cheyungese are being treated to."

I heard Hazard chuckle. My all-embracing curiosity, of which I could no more rid myself than of my head, always amused him. His was the opposite nature, a single-track and peculiarly efficient mind that tended always to concentrate, driving straight toward its goal. In other ways we were much alike, and I rather think our great difference in this one respect rather accentuated our success. It's not always easy to tell just what bit of knowledge may be relevant to a case.

"You're incorrigible, Partridge," he said. "A minute ago you wanted nothing but a bed. But I'm agreed; it'll do no harm to have a look."

So I called out to our number one donkey man to keep on his way to Chang Pei Ying's official inn and we turned off the road toward the temple, following the narrow paths marked by whitewashed rocks with which the little vegetable patches were bordered. The nearer we approached the temple, the louder became the chanting—now unmistakably one of those mystic formulas, almost unworded and hypnotic in their prolonged monotony, with which the Taoist priests befog the minds of their followers.

WE WERE almost at the gateway of the temple compound when I saw vaguely a figure standing just to one side of it in the shadow of the wall, partly concealed behind the left pillar of the high archway. Some one, apparently, who wanted to keep out of sight and who would, indeed, have been out of sight to any one approaching the gate from the town. A white man, by his stature—then, impulsively, he sprang out at us. It was Missionary MacDonald.

"Mon, mon," he greeted us, gripping a hand of each, "but I'm glad to see ye. And wherever did ye come from?"

We were both surprized, but I think neither of us betrayed it.

"From wandering up and down the earth," replied Hazard, "like the individual who, I suppose you'll say, is the master of this temple."

"'Tis true, and 'tis not a matter for jesting," replied MacDonald rather warmly, but he gave Hazard's hand an extra shake before releasing it.

MacDonald was at once one of the most striking and amusing figures we'd discovered in far-off Shensi. Physically a true son of the Highlands, tall, raw-boned and powerful, he was clad from chin to heels

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in a long, blue gown, the close-woven goods of which was unique in Shensi and had evidently been sent him from the States. Peculiar enough he'd have looked in that costume, topped by a little blue cloth cap with a purplish button, even without his great, flaming, red beard that spread fan-shaped over the breast of his gown and enveloped his face like an aureole.

"Red-haired *kuei-tsu*" (devil), the unregenerate among the natives had called him, while to Hazard and me he was "Moses of Shensi." But the deadly earnestness of the man forbade much levity at his expense. Really, we liked him, and he was doing a good work in Cheyung and teaching other things than his Gospel.

Greetings over, we turned toward the temple, the translation of which into a place of Taoist propaganda really omened ill for the town. The modern so-called teacher of Tao is very much a grafter, battening on the ignorance and superstition that it is his business to create and perpetuate. Great miracle-workers are the members of the hierarchy—a claim they back up by jugglery and conjuring of no mean sort, by no means forgetting to take toll as they go, in the shape of material reward or political power.

Evidently some such profitable rite was about to be enacted inside the temple, for the speaker had passed from his incantation into a speech that was urgently persuasive—to just what action I couldn't quite make out.

"Verily, as you say," asserted MacDonald soberly and with unaccustomed melancholy, "the one with horns and hoofs has come to this town since your departure. Ye found me meditating on his works, the better to combat them, but 'tis but peetifully weak I feel at times against the doings of Satan. Surely I am but a poor instrument for the Lord's will."

From that he passed to telling us, guided by a few questions on our part, all the facts concerning the Taoist invasion. The pertinent points were that it had begun nearly two months before, that its chief spirit was one Ma An Liang, who had brought with him a dozen or more Kanzu devotees, and that, already, pandering particularly to the Shensian belief in amulets, it had won over a good percentage of the townspeople, including many members of MacDonald's own flock.

Of course, it couldn't be expected that the Scotch zealot would speak of this temperately. Particularly bitter did he seem concerning his own lack of money to meet the bid of Ma An Liang for the rental of the temple, and he even raged a little against Chang Pei Ying for accepting the higher bid of the Taoist against his own protestations. This last was rather unreasonable. Taoism, with all its faults, was a Chinese religion, and Chang Pei Ying, with all his virtues, had the lazy-mindedness of his class and could hardly be expected to recognize its faults until they were well thrust upon him.

When MacDonald had finished I proposed that he chance a look inside the temple, but he had seen the spectacle once and refused with some heat to contaminate his eyes again. He promised, however, to wait for us at the gateway, so Hazard and I proceeded up the broken and ruinous tiled walk that led through the compound, walking on our toes and keeping well in the shadow of the shrubbery that edged it.

Climbing up a long succession of low steps, we came to a broad portico, the arched roof of which was supported by pillars. Though there were watchers in the antechamber, we each managed to reach a pillar from behind which we got a fairly good view of the conclusion of a typical Taoist ceremony.

First, there were the blue-garmented converts and near-converts, a solid mass of them, squatting cross-legged on the broken brick floor. Then was a ten-foot interval, the three major images of the Taoist Panthenon, with Laotzu the Unapproachable in the middle. Just to the right front of this inane-featured god—whose images, by the way, I half believed the Taoists did protect in some strange manner from profane hands, so various had been the tales I'd heard of men who'd come to grief from touching them—stood the man whom MacDonald had named Ma An Liang.

The place was dimly lighted by flickering candles and reddish flames from two sacrificial bowls placed on either side of the altar. Even in that light Ma An Liang was an impressive and unusual figure—tall and spare, with a uniquely thin face, high cheekbones and narrow eyes that were just now contracted to mesmeric pin-points. His

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one outer garment was the usual long mandarin robe with the sleeves shortened somewhat, leaving his hands free.

While his singsong, queerly fascinating voice, at once soothing and exciting, recited an unintelligible rite, his slender, clever fingers were busy with a very peculiar work.

On a small stand about four feet in front of the image of Laotzu rested a grass basket. From this basket Ma An Liang took successively many couples of articles. First there were two small knives, then two copper *tungtses*, then two bronze rings, and there were several pairs of small silver coins—all evidently collected from the credulous and tricked audience for their further befuddlement.

Each twin offering Ma An Liang held for a moment just in front of, and above, the debased modern presentment of the gentle-souled Laotzu. When he released them, they would flutter slowly downward, as if partially upheld by some strange force. But when they came before the open mouth of the god they'd pause and float suspended for a moment. Then one would slowly glide sidewise between the grinning jaws while the other, suddenly released, fell into the left hand of Ma An Liang, who reached down to receive it. He then handed it, doubtless charmed into a prosperity-insuring amulet, back to the devotee to whom it belonged, who crept up, *ke'towing* to the floor, to receive it.

It was a trick I'd heard of before—not the strangest in the Taoist repertoire—a very practical device for at once impressing and winning converts and adding to the wealth of the miracle-worker, but for the life of me I couldn't see how it was done.

We watched this for some minutes, impressed by the cleverness of it. Then, at Hazard's whispered suggestion to withdraw, we crept back to the gate and rejoined MacDonald, who only fumed angrily when we commented on the spectacle.

At our request he accompanied us to the gate of the *yamen*, saving us some little distance by his knowledge of a short-cut through the labyrinthic streets of the town. There he left us, again suggesting by his manner some remaining animosity against the man whose message to us had suggested such urgent need of help.

In fifteen minutes—the old mandarin's love of the roundabout in discourse being somewhat negatived under stress—we had learned of a crime as seemingly inexplicable as I've ever known and of an inexorable command of self-punishment upon the innocent the like of which I thought had been abandoned in the Middle Kingdom years before.

II

"YOU have honored your unworthy servant," said Chang Pei Ying, "in answering his summons so swiftly."

We were seated in the magistrate's reception-room, sipping the inevitable tea. The usual coterie of servants had disappeared at a wave of Chang Pei Ying's hand.

"We did our ignoble best," I replied. "The prospect of being found of use by his excellency filled us with prideful joy."

"It is I and my ancestors' graves that are elevated. My stupidity is great and I have need of intelligence. Save that we had sworn the honorable oath of friendship, my insignificant troubles would never have reached you."

His appearance was more accurate than his words in suggesting the gravity of his difficulties. Of course, his calm courtesy was not a whit shaken—one could never conceive of that—and he was as immaculately gowned and groomed as ever, but he had aged years in the two months since we had seen him last, and the gentle eyes with which he had contemplated life so long were strained with worry. It was, however, with the ineffable composure of his race, rising easily above such light matters as life and death, that he told us what had happened.

Four days ago he had received from his masters in Peking, under government seal, that fatal token the use of which was inaugurated by the Manchus to save expense of trial and permit a faithless official to leave this world with some outward appearance of honor. In short, he had received the suicide cord.

He pulled it out of his gown and showed it to us. Though I'd often heard of the fatal thing, I'd never seen one before and I examined it eagerly. It was about a quarter of an inch thick and four feet long, looped at the end like a noose, silvery gray in base color but with an elongated replica of a yellow dragon woven with remarkable

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skill into its surface and extending from end to end. Handling the cord made the story I'd heard—that it couldn't be duplicated save by a certain master workman in the Forbidden City—seem more credible, but, of course, it wasn't necessary to believe that to understand the cord's potency. It was at least as difficult of duplication as a document, and it would be received only—as in the present instance—under official seal and by a man who knew the reason he had been condemned to die.

The reason was, briefly, that he'd lost the entire government tax receipts just collected by him from the various towns of his district, which he had been about to forward to Peking. That is, the money had been stolen from him in a manner "surpassing his foolishness to understand." Hoping to find the money by a rigid search of Cheyung and so to save his face from the appearance of carelessness, he had failed to report the loss—a fact which had evidently convinced Peking that he had himself been the thief.

Just how his superiors had learned of his complicity he couldn't explain, except by a vague reference to the Central Government's "ten thousand eyes." He had been expecting a courier with the tax requisitions for the ensuing year. The courier had come with what seemed the usual roll of papers, but upon opening it Chang Pei Ying had discovered the death-commanding cord.

He had that same day learned that we were again in his district and had immediately sent for us. Not, as we gathered, that he had any idea of evading his punishment. The old magistrate lived by the ancient law of China, which forbids in honor any quibbling in matters of this sort, and to himself he was already as good as dead.

He must die whether the money was found or not, but for his memory's good and that his sons might worship his grave in honor he prayed that Hazard and I attempt the task. Which, of course, we were eager to do for his sake, even apart from the interest of the case itself. I immediately asked for fuller details, whereupon Chang Pei Ying invited us to visit the place from which the money had been taken.

While he was leading us there he informed us that the amount had been about ten thousand *taels*, entirely in silver sycees, and that these sycees had been contained in five heavy canvas sacks weighing a hundred and fifty *catties* each, or about two hundred pounds—a weight and bulk of loot that already made the theft from the guarded *yamen* sufficiently mysterious.

FIVE minutes later, investigation of the looted treasure vault had turned the mystery into a seeming impossibility.

We passed from the reception room into a narrow corridor between Chang Pei Ying's living-rooms and thence into his bedroom, a small chamber at the very rear of the *yamen*. It had one door, which the mandarin told us was always locked at night, and two high windows crossed with iron bars. At his request we helped him move his bed, one of those heavy wooden affairs which the better class of Chinese affect instead of the brick *k'ang*. Underneath the bed we discovered a trap-door, through which we passed down a short flight of steps into the blackness of a cellar.

Hazard came last and lowered the trap-door behind him. I struck a match and, following Chang Pei Ying's directions, found and lit two Chinese candles—much wax and little wick stuck in candlesticks bracketed on the stone wall.

"The money was taken from here in the night, as I have told you," said Chang Pei Ying. "Before retiring, I examined it, for its possession was on my mind. In the morning I looked for it again and it was gone."

He raised his hands in an expression of hopeless bewilderment.

"And it was in sacks weighing close to two hundred pounds!" I cried incredulously.

"Even so," he bowed.

The place wasn't over twelve feet square and its walls were of solid rock, unbroken except for a very small window in the outer wall near the ceiling—a window through which barred starlight shone faintly. Hazard crossed quickly to this window and I followed him. It was about twelve inches on each edge and one could hardly thrust his fist between the three heavy iron bars that closed it. A moment's examination showed that they were cemented unyieldingly, top and bottom, into

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crevices cut in the solid rock. Looking out, we saw that the bottom of the window was level with the surface of the ground.

There was nothing clearer to me than that the thief hadn't used the window, for even if the bars had been removed—which was impossible—the opening would hardly have accommodated the body of an infant. I said something of the sort to Hazard, who agreed absentmindedly.

As I was turning away, I heard a muttered exclamation from Hazard. I looked back just in time to see him close his hand swiftly. In the dim light I saw a heavy frown on his usually imperturbable, if unsophisticated, face. Something had evidently both angered and puzzled him—something that he had just discovered, but since he saw fit to say nothing I turned to Chang Pei Ying.

"Where were the sacks of sycees—where did they lie?" I asked.

He indicated a spot just at the foot of the stairway, as far from the window as possible.

"They couldn't have gone through the window," I said.

"That is unmistakably true," he agreed.

"But there's the floor," I said, "and the sides of the wall. It seems unlikely, but the thief may have tunneled his way in and closed the opening after him as he left."

The magistrate shook his head.

"My poor eyes are old," he said, "but blindness has not yet come to them. I examined everything with great care. The rocks lie as they have lain for three hundred years, but if you wish to satisfy yourselves——"

"Well," said Hazard slowly, "it will do no harm."

I began to hope against hope that the mystery might be solved after all. Plainly Hazard had found food for thought, and nothing that wasn't relevant to the discovery of the money could have interested him then. Moreover, I'd had much experience of his ability to build upon the slenderest clue a whole superstructure of facts—a process of imaginative reasoning that worked from the known to the unknown with the utmost certitude. His theory was that nothing was impossible save a variation from the laws of logic. Using those laws, he would build up a case, much as a scientist builds up from the tiniest bone a complete conception of an antediluvian monster.

During the simple process of verifying Chang Pei Ying's statement Hazard worked automatically and clearly, with his mind elsewhere. It was soon evident that neither floor nor wall could have been penetrated without leaving distinct evidence behind, for, in the course of the centuries Chang Pei Ying had mentioned, a sort of dry mold had formed over the surface of the rocks and in all the intersections and crevices. Nowhere was that mold broken.

"Well," I said at last to Chang Pei Ying, "there's only one way the money could have been removed. That is up the stairway and through your room."

He smiled quietly.

"So they at Peking would have said, which is another reason I wished to find it myself. It could not have been so taken without my knowledge."

It seemed an *impassé*, but here Hazard broke in with his first question.

"Why do you think the money is still in Cheyung?"

"There is the wall about the city," said Chang Pei Ying. "I have had it watched day and night."

"That is good," approved Hazard. Then, rather carelessly, "My friend and I met our brother, the American missionary, who seemed rather aggrieved at your excellency. Is it because you have let the Temple of the Hundred Steps to the Taoist priest?"

"Unfortunately it is true," said Chang Pei Ying. "In that he is doubly wrong, for it was a matter of duty that I accept the higher offer; and next month, if this thing had not come upon me, the temple would have been his, for Ma An Liang does not preach the pure Taoism and it is not good for the people of Cheyung that they should believe in magic."

"That is what we believed," said Hazard quietly. "And now my friend and I would put our two poor brains together. Would your excellency leave us alone?"

CHANG PEI YING assented to this cool request without apparent surprize and rather laboriously mounted the stairs. When he was gone Hazard turned to me swiftly.

"What do you make of this, Partridge?" he asked, a peculiar mixture of anger and elation in his voice.

"Frankly, nothing," I confessed.

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"Then nothing you've seen tonight gives you an idea?"

"Why," I said, "we've seen nothing except that infernal Taoist mummery."

"Um!" he grunted. "Well, what about this?"

He shoved out at me a tiny snarl of blue ravelings—half a dozen threads matted together.

"Why, that—" I hesitated.

"Take it. Look at it. What do you make of it?"

As I fingered the stuff, recognition came to me with a quick catch of the breath.

"Why, that—that looks as if—there's no Chinese cloth made like that".

"MacDonald's gown?" questioned Hazard.

Ther was no use denying it.

"Yes. Where did you find it?"

"I found it," half whispered Hazard, "perfectly visible, caught just under the window on a sharp edge of rock."

"My ——, Hazard!" I cried. "You don't think——"

"Well, I think," said Hazard, smiling curiously, "that if MacDonald's compound were thoroughly searched there'd be signs of recent digging found in it somewhere, and at least part of the silver sycees."

"What the devil!" remonstrated. "You're wrong this time. It's true he needed money, or thought he did, and true he's at odds with Chang Pei Ying. I admit this is against him, but he isn't a thief. He couldn't be. We've laughed at him a little—but thieves don't come to western China to do missionary work. It takes some courage, that, and——"

"Hold up, Partridge," interrupted Hazard good-naturedly. "Who accused him? Not I—and yet what I've said is true. By the way, isn't it also true that Taoist temples are accounted sanctuary, like the Buddhist monasteries, and are beyond search by the law?"

"Yes," I said wonderingly.

"And yet I believe," he went on thoughtfully, "that the priests claim that ugly god of theirs, Laotzu, has power to detect a criminal and mark him in some way, if he's brought before them for judgment."

"The Kansu Taoists make some such infernal pretence to help them get rid of people who are in their way. But what's that to do with MacDonald?"

"A lot," smiled Hazard, "as I think you'll agree presently. But even now, don't you begin to see the light?"

"Well," I said slowly, "if MacDonald isn't guilty, the evidence must have been planted against him. The man that planted it must have been the thief, because, until we were told, no one but Chang Pei Ying was supposed to know of the robbery."

"You forget the party that sent the news to Peking," said Hazard, with a queerly suggestive note in his voice.

"Why, yes," I said, taken aback for a moment, "I had forgotten about that—but mayn't that have been the thief, too?"

"Now we're coming to it," said Hazard with satisfaction. "The thing's narrowed down to some one who wished to dispose of both MacDonald and Chang Pei Ying—Chang Pei Ying first by the suicide route, then MacDonald by accusation of the theft before Chang Pei Ying's successor. I thought of that immediately I found these bits of cloth—which, by the way, would be no evidence before Chang Pei Ying, for if they'd been there when he examined this place after the theft there's little doubt he would have found them. Until Chang Pei Ying told us of his changed attitude toward Taoism I wasn't quite certain as to the villain's identity."

"It's Ma An Liang," I said. "A political aggressive—the hierarchy want one of their own men for magistrate, of course."

"Unquestionably. And—well, there's something else he's done, I think, but we'll let that go. Just now we'll not worry about how he did it, either, that'll probably come out. Now it's a question of getting the sycees back. As I've said, I think we'll find that he's planted some of them around MacDonald's grounds. It would be the natural thing for him to do, but the balance—where would you say that was?"

"In the temple."

"Yes, but where in the temple?"

"There's only one place for it," I said, after a moment's thought, "and that's somewhere near Laotzu the Unapproachable. They'd be safe there, even from the Taoist acolytes themselves, which is saying a great deal."

"I thought we'd agree on that. Now as to the manner of getting hold of them. We might be able to argue Chang Pei Ying into breaking the law and custom and making a search for them, but I doubt

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it. And even if we did—well, Ma An Liang's a clever devil. There'd be delay, maybe a fight, and he might find means of spiriting the silver away from the temple as he seems to have spirited it out of this cellar. We must think of a way to take him by surprize, and fortunately the Taoists themselves have provided the way."

"What do you mean?"

"Well," said Hazard, "there's MacDonald, upon whom Ma An Liang is dead anxious to fix this crime. There's the evidence against MacDonald, which would justify us in accusing him. There's the Taoist claim that Laotzu has the power to detect guilt. Chang Pei Ying could probably be prevailed upon to scatter a few soldier *shimbos* (policemen) through the audience which would gather to see MacDonald's trial. That's about our only chance to get Ma An Liang on even terms. It would be a risky business if we weren't absolutely sure of our conclusions."

"It seems to me a bit risky anyway," I said, "but we can narrow the location of the silver down a bit more. If it's near the image—where we've agreed it is—it must be under it. There's no other place for it."

"Right you are. Well, we'll see Chang Pei Ying and send for MacDonald."

"Poor Chang Pei Ying!" I murmured as we ascended the stairs. "All this doesn't save him from the suicide order."

"Perhaps not," said Hazard thoughtfully, "and then again— Well, we'll see about that, and also by what sort of magic they got the money out of this cellar, which I admit I can't yet comprehend."

III

WHEN all parties think they have something to gain in a matter, an agreement is quickly reached. Chang Pei Ying balked but little at our proposal after we'd gotten him to believe in Ma An Liang's guilt.

MacDonald's fervor against Taoism impelled him even more than his very human rage when we showed him the evidence that had been planted against him in the cellar and in his own compound—for there, the next morning, after two hours' probing, we found about a hundred silver sycees buried, as Hazard had prophesied. Of course Ma An Liang's sinister face grew grim with satisfaction at the seeming opportunity we offered him to dispose effectually of his Christian competitor.

The one trouble we had was when Hazard asked Chang Pei Ying to entrust him for the day with the suicide cord. It seemed that there was some rule that a condemned man shouldn't let the cord out of his possession, but must return it to Peking immediately before executing its sentence. Personally, I didn't see why Hazard wanted it; but he finally won his point, after taking Chang Pei Ying to one side and talking with him for some time.

It was Ma An Liang's proselyting and vindictive idea to make the trial a public spectacle—a proposal against which neither Hazard nor I could offer effective arguments. We did, however, insist upon ourselves being the custodian of the prisoner's person until Laotzu had passed upon his guilt or innocence, when, of course, Chang Pei Ying would send him to the American consular authorities in Sianfu. That, whatever Laotzu's verdict, as matters outwardly stood, for the seeming evidence against him was already strong enough to warrant trial, and there was no proper jurisdiction in Cheyung.

So, late that afternoon, MacDonald—his bushy red beard fairly bristling with not unnatural rage and his fiery face and eyes alight with it—stood perhaps six feet in front of the altar of Laotzu and the two inferior gods, with Hazard and myself on either side of him. Just behind us sat Chang Pei Ying in a ceremonial chair brought from the *yamen*. Behind him the temple was crowded with curious townspeople, mainly Taoist converts, with the acolytes whom Ma An Liang had brought from Kansu sprinkled here and there. When I considered what was going to happen I was glad to remember that there were *shimbos* obedient to Chang Pei Ying scattered through that audience.

The outer door had been closed and the windows shuttered. The place was lighted, as it had been the preceding night, with dimly flickering candles and reddish flames from the two sacrificial bowls. Even this light was absorbed somewhat by billowing folds of purple silk which overhung the whole chamber at a height of about fifteen feet.

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So we waited while Ma An Liang performed innumerable prostrations before Laotzu, chanting mystic invocations the while. Hazard fidgeted a great deal, his sharp, microscopically observant eyes distended and uneasy, but he delighted in disarming suspicion by playing a commonplace rôle. Inwardly he was, doubtless, cool enough. I felt, however, much as he looked, for I knew too much of the wizardry of the Taoist priests to expect any commonplace outcome to the affair or to think that our part in it would be devoid of danger.

Finally Ma An Liang concluded his ceremony of worship, stood for a moment in a receptive attitude, head close to the idol's evily grinning face, and then turned and announced in his high-pitched, chanting voice the god's acquiescence to the proposal.

"Laotzu the all-knowing, father of a thousand gods, worker of a thousand miracles, guarded by a thousand guards, has said that he will pronounce judgment, and his sign of guilt shall be the sign of the stricken face."

MacDonald muttered something under his breath. I think it was a prayer to be forgiven for lending himself to the impiety. As he stepped forward to his place before the idol I braced myself for swift action and I saw that Hazard did the same. Ma An Liang, through whose racial immobility of feature gloating triumph was breaking in spite of himself, withdrew until he had placed the image of the god between him and his intended victim. Over the credulous mass of humanity that crowded the temple behind us came an awed and expectant silence.

That silence was more impressive than any continued incantation would have been, and just before Laotzu struck his inexplicable blow I was shivering in anticipation of what might happen if in the slightest respect we had been wrong in our conclusions. As the Chinaman is in his ordinary mood the most peaceable of men, so in his rare moments of frenzy he is the most uncontrollable and dangerous, and if we couldn't justify the sacrilege we were about to commit it would be strange if either Hazard, MacDonald or I lived an hour longer. I still think we were chancing more on the correctness of our judgment than was altogether wise.

MacDONALD was standing very stiff and straight, with a strange dignity about him that made me wonder we had ever made jests at his expense. He seemed to be looking squarely into Ma An Liang's eyes, from which the fanatic's light had passed, leaving them dead, cold and malicious as a serpent's, when suddenly his body twitched convulsively from head to foot.

I saw that and heard a hoarse cry of astonishment and rage burst from the missionary's lips, but it wasn't till I'd followed his left hand to his cheek, that I recognized the cause. He brushed his check and for an instant looked bewilderedly at his fingers, which were covered with blood. As if struck by an invisible talon, the skin of his cheek had been ripped upward from jaw to brow.

The thing was so astounding that for a moment longer Hazard and I stood in our tracks. A low, excited cry went up from the Chinese behind us. The malignancy on Ma An Liang's face increased to a devil's measure. He opened his mouth, I suppose to announce the judgment that had been passed, and remained with it open, staring fixedly at Hazard.

A strange look of dismay had quite eclipsed the priest's evil ecstasy of triumph. Out of the corner of my eye I was able to see that Hazard had pulled from the front of his hunting coat the potent suicide cord Chang Pei Ying had loaned him, and seemed to be holding it toward Ma An Liang. I didn't understand it and had no time to figure it out.

The instant I glanced at Hazard, MacDonald, recovering from the paralysis of astonishment, leaped toward Ma An Liang. This was my cue, but I was an instant late in reaching the image of Laotzu, which I had been detailed to overturn. As I buckled my shoulder under the half-raised arm, I saw a peculiar thing—the loop of the silver-and-dragon cord, skilfully flung by Hazard, had settled like a noose over Ma An Liang's head.

In my ears still echoed the cry Hazard had sent with the cord—

"Faithless official," he had cried in Shensian, "execute yourself the judgment of *Tsi'an!*"

I heaved at the image. As I did so I saw Ma An Liang, with the token of death still dangling from his neck, spring sidewise

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and whirl with one leg swinging outward, kicking MacDonald's feet out from under him and sending him sprawling upon the floor. This wasn't quite as we had calculated. I knew that Hazard had turned with Chang Pei Ying to face the yellow mob which, by the sound, was rising in a turbulent mass. It was my business to find the sycees while MacDonald handled Ma An Liang, but Ma An Liang was yanking a revolver from the front of his gown.

Laotzu gave way at my second great effort and toppled and tumbled backward. I dropped behind the base of the image just in time to escape a bullet which Ma An Liang sent at my head. So, on hands and knees, my head over the edge of the hiding-place which had been under the idol, I found the thing we had been seeking, the shoe-shaped silver coins. The hole was filled to the top with them.

"They're here, Hazard, they're here!" I cried out as I came to my feet again.

"Of course," rasped Hazard over his shoulder. "Watch Ma An Liang."

I'd pulled my revolver as I spoke, and at the same moment I observed that Hazard was standing with his own gun swinging like a snake's head, covering the front of the shifting, hot-breathed but irresolute crowd, through which about twenty *shimbos* were already forcing their way toward us. MacDonald was getting to his feet—altogether, things were coming our way.

But, just as I thought that, there happened what was very nearly, while it endured, the most terrifying experience of a life that hasn't been commonplace. Still, it was an experience that I deserved in a way, for I had remained standing just in front of the opening in the floor over which Laotzu had rested. I should have known that there was some foundation to the many stories I'd heard of the punishment with which the god smote trespassers. Besides, the strength of Laotzu had already been intimated in the mysterious blow that had been dealt MacDonald.

All of a sudden I was enveloped. I was enveloped in the almost imperceivable—in something that had descended swiftly from above. From head to foot I found myself suddenly enshrouded in filaments little larger than a spider's thread, blending with the air almost invisibly. When I thrust out my hands, those filaments gave way with absolutely no resistance. But when I leaped away—or tried to—they caught me as with hundreds of tearing talons.

They held me. I saw Hazard turn his head and knew that sheer terror had fetched a cry from my throat. Then the hundreds of needle-like points that had penetrated my clothing and bit into my skin dug deeper; the next moment I was dragged upward and off my feet. The innumerable filaments, tightening, had proved to be wires—the finest of wires, controlled from above and tipped at their ends with some sort of hooks.

I heard Ma An Liang laugh madly—a shrill, exultant laugh that had something of desperation in it, too; it pealed through the temple like the ringing of a knell. Then I flung my head back—much pain it cost me, for one of those hooks had caught into the base of my skull—and saw at least who operated the infernal device.

From behind one of the great cloud-like folds of silk and through the maze of fine wires above me, a Chinaman peered down, his own face distorted by terror at the confusion he saw below. I could only see his head and shoulders, but he seemed to be standing upright on some support, and his right shoulder was hunched back as if he held his hand on a lever.

"Partridge, oh, Partridge!" I heard Hazard cry; and there was even more fear and agony in his voice at my predicament, than I was feeling. I looked down and saw that he was running toward me.

Crack!

Ma An Liang had fired again. He had not fired at me—I was out of the game—but at Hazard. The instant he had pulled the trigger, however, MacDonald had struck up his hand. So happened a thing which may have seemed to Ma An Liang—professed miracle-worker that he was and probably, in spite of his mechanical aids, more than half self-deluded—a direct intervention by an unfriendly Justice stronger than his own god.

His bullet, thus diverted, sped upward and through the brain of his coworker above.

Swinging now with my feet well above the floor of the temple, I saw the yellow face that peered through the purple folds of silk suddenly disappear behind a spurt of blood. The man fell backward and for a moment the silken curtain that

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roofed the place was violently agitated just below where he had stood. Then it was still.

MA AN LIANG, seeing what his shot had done, seeing that Chang Pei Ying's soldier *shimbos* had by now lined the front of the altar and that even the Taoist acolytes were over-awed, realizing that with the discovery of the stolen sycees and of the methods wherewith he worked his trickery his power in Cheyung had passed, and perhaps already feeling, in anticipation, the racking pains of the punishments that might soon be his for these and for another, greater, crime—with all these things upon his mind he wrenched away from MacDonald again with leopard-like agility and leaped toward a door in the rear of the chamber.

Simultaneously I felt the deadly mesh in which I was enveloped give way. It gave way suddenly, as the Taoist acolyte who had controlled the hidden mechanism above had died, and I hit the floor on my feet. I hit it, of course, struggling to free myself from the torture-tipped wires that now were loose and dangling, and I succeeded quickly, for their purposes of magic had required that the hooks at the end of the wires which had held me be not barbed but straight-edged, like bent pins. However, Hazard and MacDonald stopped to help me and so we lost Ma An Liang.

"There is no escape. There is no escape," Chang Pei Ying kept repeating as we battered at the door through which the Taoist imposter-priest had fled. "My *shimbos* watch the windows; there is no escape."

Still, he was mistaken; Ma An Liang had made the great escape. He had escaped from life itself. For when we found him he was hanging from a rafter, and the cord with which he had hanged himself was the silver-and-yellow suicide cord which he himself had sent to Chang Pei Ying.

"I suspected it from the first," said Hazard later. "You may remember I hinted it. As a matter of fact, the custom of the suicide cord went out with the Manchus, but to honest old Chang Pei Ying, as to most of these Shensi mandarins, even the facts of the revolution have hardly leaked and the old customs are still binding. Ma An Liang gambled on that and came near winning!"

"But the cord itself was genuine, wasn't it, and under the government seal?"

I was lying at the moment on Chang Pei Ying's own bed, not entirely recovered from the shock and the slight poisoning of the several hundred tiny wounds I'd received.

"Well, as to the last, it's simple enough. You remember Chang Pei Ying expected a government courier with the tax requisitions, and the package he received was so similar in form that he didn't know the difference till he had opened it. Ma An Liang knew it—it was a matter of routine—and it was easy enough for one with his following to have the government messenger waylaid, to melt off the government seal and substitute the cord for the papers, and to send it in by one of his own men dressed in the dead courier's clothes. As to the genuineness of the cord, it's a matter of conjecture, but I believe it did, at last, the work it was intended to do."

"Meaning——"

"There have been a few Chinese mandarins," said Hazard, "who have preferred to add dishonor to dishonor by substituting flight for self-inflicted death. I think Ma An Liang was one of them. He had probably kept the cord in hopes of using it in some such devil's game as this we've thwarted."

"Then that," I said slowly, "was the meaning of what you said to him when you flung the cord over his head. 'The judgment of Tsi'an'—of course, he would probably have gotten the cord from her, the old Empress Dowager. Well, he was a clever rascal."

"Clever enough," replied Hazard, "and for a while he furnished us with a perplexing mystery, but we've nothing to be proud of in this affair. To think that we didn't understand from the beginning the mechanism of his mummery—invisible wires and hooks such as are used by every stage magician in tricks of levitation—and to see how they could be used to guard the image and to mark the faces of men brought before it for trial, and even to accomplish the seemingly impossible robbery!"

"Of course," I said, rather wearily, "the canvas sacks of silver were first hooked by many of these lines, then drawn up to the window, cut open, and their contents removed through the bars by single sycees."

"Of course," said Hazard.

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The Wooing of Placide Dumaine

by HERMANN BACHER DEUTSCH

STRIKING its level rays through the stilted palmetto camps that dot the shores of Lake Chien, the sun rose straight into a turquoise sky out of the sea-marshes of Lower Terrebonne. With its rising there appeared from Pointe Bienvenue the oyster fleet, chugging across the rippling waters of Lake Chien in Indian file.

First came the trim schooner of Placide Dumaine, who never failed to lead the fleet in its run down Bayou Terrebonne to the oyster beds of Lake Chien. Placide's little schooner was the cleanest and fastest vessel of the fleet which *put-putted* its way from the canning company docks every Monday and Thursday morning in the hours between midnight and dawn.

All about the shallow tide-flats of Lake Chien, were numbered stakes that marked the boundaries of the various oyster leaseholds. Placide greeted the sight of his own familiar corner stakes with a grunt of surprize this morning. They were the same old stakes, to be sure, with the same weather-worn number boards. Nor was it the fat, sleepy pelican perched atop the nearest stake that caused Placide to open his eyes so wide.

When he had left his oyster beds early Saturday afternoon—the first of the bayou fleet to make "full boat"—a sight along the western stakes of his lease gave a line squarely to the third of a group of palmetto camps back on the marshes. This morning, as he sighted along those stakes, the line passed fully twenty yards to the east of that same camp.

"Somebody, he fool with him, sure," murmured Placide and, bringing his little boat alongside, he pulled up the two stakes and shifted them to their original position. Just as he completed this task, a coarse voice hailed him——

"Where you move those stakes, *hein?*"

It was André Chotard, Placide's neighbor on the west, who put the question.

"I think mebby somebody changes stakes on us, André," replied Placide quietly. "I'm putting them back, right where they ought to be."

"Not if I know it, you're not."

André's schooner, lugger-built and much bulkier than Placide's trim craft, headed directly for the stakes, and Placide had his hands full to pole back his own boat in time to avoid a collision. Leaning over the gunwale, André extended two great, corded, hairy arms and pulled the stakes from the mud as easily as if he had been plucking grass stems. In a moment he had replaced them at the points where Placide had found them on his arrival.

André then ran his boat alongside Placide's schooner and laughed across——

"You don't kick, *hein?*" he jeered.

Placide shook his head. All Bayou Terrebonne knew André Chotard, and not for nothing was he called the "King of the Oyster Pirates." Such a small matter as

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that of moving lease stakes in order to increase his own holdings substantially at the expense of his neighbors' was nothing new in the career of André Chotard. True, there had been those who protested and those who gave battle. It is not the Bayou fashion to "notch" weapons. That is why there were not three notches in the handle of André's sheath-knife.

André drew off and returned to his own beds, running out his vessel's tiny anchor when he had reached a favorable spot. The other schooners of the fleet were all anchored by this time, and from all of them pirogues were being pushed out and paddled ashore. It was low tide and the oyster clusters along the mud flats were exposed.

Stepping out of their pirogues, the oystermen, hatchets in hand, picked up the clusters, chipping out the oysters of marketable size and sowing the culls carefully back on the flats.

There had been plenty of witnesses to the shifting of Placide's stakes and there was plenty of comment. Not even André Chotard had ever before dared to shift stakes in open daylight and in the owner's presence. André knew that nine out of every ten of the other oystermen would have shot him on the spot, had he dared to tamper with their stakes.

But Placide—busy, quiet, retiring little Placide Dumaine—he was the butt of Bayou Terrebonne. Among the oystermen the measure of a man was his strength and his courage. A blow was the standard argument and the strongest blow was conceded to hold the most convincing logic. He who did not use his fists to prove his worth was an outlander. Such a one was Placide Dumaine.

The morning was a hard one for Placide. When the tide came in along the passes and covered the mud-flats, the oystermen returned to their pirogues and began to tong, gathering the shell-fish into great heaps and culling them later with their hatchets.

Boldly André Chotard sent his pirogue skimming across the dimpled waters of Lake Chien into Placide's leasehold. Without any attempt at concealment, he began to tong from Placide's beds.

"*Merci*, Placide. Here's one fine bunch," he would cry.

And when he had loaded his pirogue, he returned to his own leasehold, sowing the culls from Placide's land in his own.

Noon came, but the only man to stop work was André Chotard. Stepping from his pirogue to the stern deck of his schooner, he stripped, pulling on a pair of patched and faded trunks. A magnificent figure of a man was André Chotard. Great muscles slipped and tensed ever so smoothly under his bronzed skin. For a moment he stood poised at the stern of his schooner; then, noiselessly as a shadow, he slipped into the water.

Many were the black looks which were cast in his direction as he played and gamboled about in the lake like a dolphin. André Chotard was the only man of the fleet who could stop work during the daylight hours without any apparent diminution in the size of the catch he turned in twice a week at the canning company's wharf. André Chotard never failed to make full boat. None of the other oystermen cared to charge him openly with the theft of oysters others had labored so hard to bring up from the sea, though many longed to catch him in the act of making a raid.

For a while André contented himself with swimming and playing in the water, where he seemed to be as much at home as he was in his own schooner. Then, catching sight of Placide tonging industriously, he swam to his pirogue, swung himself aboard all glistening wet and sent the light dugout skimming across to Placide's leasehold.

Into the water he dived then and when he arose to the surface he brought with him in each hand an oyster cluster. These he tossed into his pirogue, diving again and again, until the dugout was well-nigh filled. And all the while his ribald comments were an open challenge to any to stop him if they dared.

When he tired of this sport, André climbed back into his schooner and lay down on the cabin roof, sunning himself while the others worked. Once more during the course of the afternoon did he visit Placide's waters and dive until he had brought up, two clusters at a time, a pirogue-load of oysters. It was rare sport for him and a novelty to boot.

"I like your place for to swim, Placide," he called back as he prepared to return to his own holding. "I think mebby I come back many times. You don' mind, *hein?*"

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Placide said not a word, but after sundown, while the red glow from many charcoal pots, where supper was being cooked, twinkled over the lake, Placide thought long and deeply.

EARLY Wednesday morning Placide drew up the little anchor which had held his schooner and, with a great tarpaulin stretched over the heap of oysters piled on deck—the hold of the little boat had been filled the day before—headed for Pointe Bienvenue and thence up Bayou Ter'bonne.

Looking back from the point, he could see that André Chotard was diving for oysters. He knew, too, that Andre's schooner was almost filled with the shell-fish and he smiled a twisted little smile, for no man can fill a vessel like André Chotard's in two days when he dives for oysters and brings them up two clusters at a time. Assuredly, Placide had not been the only one to suffer from André's depredations.

Over toward Bayou La Peur, Placide noted a heavy cloud of low-hanging smoke where Achille Ducoin, the trapper, was burning the rank sea-grass from one of the small islands, that he might lay his hundreds of traps for mink during the approaching season. Then he forgot everything save that he was bound for town and would soon see Mariette Rivaud—not that Mariette lived in town. There had been a time when she worked in one of the canning factories there. 'Riette was an orphan and had had a pretty hard row to hoe. But her industry had enabled her to save up enough to buy a little truck patch on Bayou Terrebonne, where she now lived with a younger brother whom she planned to send to the agricultural college at Baton Rouge.

Offers of marriage had come to 'Riette in plenty, for she was beautiful and industrious. Many an oysterman and shrimp-fisher had thought to himself what a fine wife she would make. 'Riette had a way of tilting her head back when she laughed that showed her softly rounded throat. 'Riette had a way of massing her heavy, blue-black hair to give the effect of a crown. 'Riette had a way of waving a greeting to a passing boat with a free-flung gesture of one of her shapely arms. Oh, 'Riette had many such ways.

Her unhappy, orphaned childhood, however, had made her sensitive, and she shrank from the fisher-folk when they came a-courting. Then Placide saw her one Sunday night in the little white church of Père Maurin. 'Riette did not shrink from Placide—timid, gentle, quiet Placide—and on the following Sunday night they went to the church together in Placide's trim little schooner. Both of them were very happy, for, while no word of love had been spoken between them, you do not go to church together down Bayou Terrebonne way unless it is all an understood affair.

Placide made the sturdy engine of his schooner do the best it could on the way to town. For one thing, he wanted to do some shopping before he went to see 'Riette and so he hurried to the canning company's docks to sell his catch.

During the afternoon the other boats of the oyster fleet straggled in and there was much bustling, shouting and activity. Excited fishermen argued hotly about the count; the gang foreman swore busily at his sweating crew of black dock laborers; shrill voices within the wharf showed that the girls were already opening the oysters for the steaming vats.

"Oho!" It was André Chotard's great bass bellow. "Look what passes. *Hein*, Placide, you make for yourself a dress, mebby?"

Everybody on the dock turned to stare. Placide Dumaine was walking down the plank which led from the main street to the bayou wharf. With him walked Achille Ducoin, the trapper from Bayou La Peur. But what drew the eyes of the crowd was a bolt of bright, calico, print dress-goods which Placide carried over one arm. It was a present he had bought for 'Riette Rivaud.

Placide smiled sheepishly when he found himself the object of all this attention and would have passed on to his schooner, but André would not have it so. The big oysterman's eyes blazed suddenly with a new light.

"Aha, now I remember," he jeered. "You're going to the church with Mariette. Placide—ain't you afraid of girls? How comes 'Riette to go to the church with you? You answer me, eh?"

Placide's good-natured smile was gone. A dull red flush had spread over his features. He advanced toward André, but before he had taken more than a step Achille Ducoin had leaped before him.

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"Yo' keep yore tongue offen 'Riette Rivaud," the trapper commanded. "Yo' know me, André Chotard—me, Achille Ducoin."

A tenseness had fallen over the group on the dock. Achille Ducoin was large and brawny as André himself and had proven his mettle more than once. Few there were who cared to face him in open fight.

André half crouched for a moment; then he relaxed and laughed.

"*Ne fait rien*," he said slyly. "Let Placide to his own fighting. Me—nex' Sunday night—know what I do, *hein?* I think me I take Placide's girl right away from him. You watch. Nex' Sunday night at Père Maurin's church."

With another laugh he vaulted lightly from the wharf to a wooden string-piece, over which he scurried like a cat to the plank walk that led to the street.

Achille walked with Placide to the latter's boat and there left him, turning back toward the town. As he did so, he heard a contemptuous voice from the group on the dock.

"That Placide, he's one brave man—I don' think!" said the voice.

Instantly Achille had turned toward the group.

"Who say that, eh?" he demanded.

There was no reply.

"That Placide, he is one brave man," continued Achille hotly. "When the plague come to my cabin down on Bayou La Peur an' the *med'cin* from town won't come to make well my children, who you think come there an' nurse all the time and bring to eat an' save my babies? Who you think? That Placide—he done that. Anybody what think Placide, he's a coward, got to call me a coward first."

Apparently nobody cared to accept the challenge, and Achille, with something between a snarl and a growl, turned on his heel and walked swiftly away.

OVER the fields of sugar-cane, transected at regular intervals by tiny drainage canals, a full moon swung low, as if too heavy to sail very high in the heavens. Down Bayou Terrebonne puttered Placide Dumaine's little schooner. At the rudder stood Placide himself, looking vastly uncomfortable in his formal store clothes of black and his unaccustomed white collar.

Uncomfortable? Yes, but very happy, too, for seated primly on one of the lockers near the rudder was 'Riette Rivaud, resplendent in a spandy new dress of bright print calico. They did not talk, these two, for they were untutored in the sort of phrases into which emotion is translated. Placide stood up very straight indeed and carried himself as becomes a man—particularly the man who was honored by the company of 'Riette Rivaud. 'Riette kept her eyes downcast, as a maiden should. She watched the phosphorescent trail left in the black bayou by the schooner's wake, all shot through and peppered with flashes of green and yellow fire.

Thus they drew up to the tiny wharf where stood the little white church of Père Maurin. All about, similar schooners in their holiday attire—scrubbed and cleansed of the taint of oysters or shrimp which was theirs on week-days—were moored to stakes driven into the soft mud bank.

Placide helped 'Riette to alight, and together they walked to the church. There was a curious craning of necks as they entered. Carrying themselves as if they did not feel every curious pair of eyes in the church focused upon them, they sought seats in front. Not until the stir caused by their entrance had subsided did Placide venture to look about him. And then he saw, from the rearmost pew, the mocking regard of André Chotard.

Throughout the simple service Placide was conscious of that mocking stare. And when, after Père Maurin's last sonorous "*Bénédiction*," he and 'Riette turned to leave, he saw André Chotard's eyes still fixed upon them.

They were the last to leave the church, and as they passed out into the warm night André approached.

"*B'soir*, 'Riette," he said to the girl.

Startled, she shrank from him.

"No—no," cried André, laughing. "It is nothing to be afraid. I only ask to see you home, 'Riette. See, my schooner, she's here, an' scrub' like gold".

Placide took 'Riette's arm and tried to hurry to his own boat. Roughly André pushed him aside.

"You like much better to go in my boat, *hein*, 'Riette?" he asked.

Placide and André both waited for her answer. In hurt surprize the girl looked at

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Placide. Uncertainly the latter took a step forward. André laughed aloud.

"You want a real man, eh, 'Riette? Some man who's ain't afraid for you?"

Again the girl looked toward Placide. Then she drew herself up proudly.

"Mebby you don't like me to go home with you, Placide?" she asked scornfully.

"Ah, 'Riette," cried Placide, stepping quickly toward her.

But the girl drew away.

"I shall be ver' pleased to have the company of M'sieu Chotard," she said to André graciously. "Come—we mus' be going. It gets ver' late, an' my *p'tee* brother, he's home all by himself."

As she moved toward André's schooner with the big fisherman, she flung back one parting shot. Not that she spoke to Placide. Oh, no indeed. She had already resolved that never, never should she speak again to Placide Dumaine.

"But that *p'tee* brother of mine," she said to André sweetly, just loud enough for Placide to hear, "that *p'tee* brother of mine, he's not 'fraid because he's 'lone by himself. Oh, *non!*"

Perhaps it was the sound of her voice. Perhaps it was the bitter scorn her words implied. No one will know.

Certain it is, however, that something must have snapped within Placide Dumaine. Silently and with a concentration of fury in which was gathered the thought of months of torment, the little man flung himself down the embankment and full upon André Chotard. So unexpected was the rush, and so sudden was it, that it carried the brawny oysterman before it. Over and over the two rolled, down the little embankment, until they brought up at the foot of the Bayou levee.

Once there and at close quarters, Placide was at his big opponent's mercy. Scrambling to his feet, André freed himself easily from Placide's grip and drew back one of his sledge-hammer fists. A little cry from 'Riette interrupted him.

He looked about and laughed. With one hand he held Placide, who was sobbing with mingled humiliation and rage.

"You don't like for me to hurt this li'l'feller, eh, 'Riette?" André asked. "*Bien!* We let him go—see!—like so."

With what seemed to be but little more than a gesture he flung Placide to one side, so that the latter stumbled and rolled awkwardly down the levee slope. Then, lifting 'Riette bodily into his schooner, André cast off and started up the Bayou.

PLACIDE had arisen and was fumbling at his stiff collar. Suddenly he tore that offending and now futile decoration from his neck. He slipped out of the black store coat, too, and, running toward his schooner, hurled that garment into the cabin.

A wild notion of pursuit had obsessed him. He would catch André Chotard's lugger, kill André with his bare hands and teach 'Riette Rivaud that he was not a man to be trifled with. As suddenly as it had come, this fit left him. He sat down hopelessly on the bayou bank. He would have no chance with André, and he knew it. Even if he should kill the brawny oysterman with a well placed bullet, there were juries and courts on Lower Terrebonne.

And, finally, Placide was not a killer of men, and he knew it. He couldn't even have killed himself, though life without 'Riette and with André not made to feel the weight of Placide's vengeance was not worth the living. Bitterly he cursed the smallness which made him the butt of others on Bayou Terrebonne. If he were stout and strong like Achille Ducoin—Placide raised his head sharply. Achille Ducoin! By gar!

Leaping aboard his schooner, he tapped on the gasoline tank, nodded in a satisfied way, hurried aft to the engine, threw the fly-wheel over viciously and, with the first explosive bark with which the engine woke to life, slipped off the painter and backed out into the bayou. But he did not turn in the direction where lay the cabin of 'Riette Rivaud.

Heading due south toward the gulf, he kept his engine going at full power. Gone the rigid primness that had been his as he had guided his craft toward the church earlier in the evening. Keenly alert, he was no longer Placide Dumaine wooing 'Riette Rivaud, but Placide Dumaine the most skillful boatman of the oyster fleet.

On and on the sturdy little craft chugged into the night. On and on, until he had passed Sea Breeze Point and headed into Lake Barre and across its shallow waters—quickened into dancing silver under the pouring radiance of the moon—into the mouth of Bayou La Peur.

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Impatient as he was of delay, he slowed the boat's progress here, for he did not care to chance a collision with the sprawled trunk of some derelict log. Cautiously but steadily he made his way up Bayou La Peur, counting the mouths of the lateral bayous as he passed them.

Beyond the mouth of Little-go-to-hell he stopped his engine and nosed cautiously into the soft bank. Driving his oyster tongs into the mud, handles down, he looped his painter about the improvised stake and scrambled into the rank undergrowth ashore.

It was the wild clamor that broke out among his hounds that startled Achille Ducoin, the trapper, out of his slumbers. As the uproar increased in volume, Achille leaped out of bed, seized a double-barreled shotgun and stepped outside. With his appearance the clamor of the dogs subsided, and through the comparative silence he heard a low voice.

"*V'la*, Achille," said the voice. "It's me —Placide. Don' make no noise and don' let those dog make none. I come to you."

Achille calmed his dogs with a few whispered words. By the time he turned around again, Placide Dumaine stood beside him. Briefly he recounted what had happened at the church.

"By gar!" Achille ground out, teeth clenched. "I kill that André Chotard plenty, Placide. I kill him so sure as ——."

Placide made an impatient gesture. Drawing close, he whispered a few words to the trapper. The latter started.

"Eh?" he said softly. Then he whistled. "Sure, Placide. All of him you like. Wait. I help you carry him to the boat."

WHEN the oyster fleet rounded Pointe Bienvenue in Indian file at daybreak the following morning, Placide's schooner was already anchored in Lake Chien. The surprize which this evoked, however, was as nothing to the surprize that followed when André Chotard, on approaching his oyster beds, gave a veritable roar of rage.

During the night Placide had shifted the boundary stakes not to their original position, but beyond, thus including within his own lease a goodly share of André's.

"You think you play with me so, eh?" bellowed André. "Me—I think I show you pretty quick how you play with André Chotard. See, Placide, how I do?"

Stepping into his pirogue, he skimmed over the dancing water of Lake Chien and pulled up the stakes. Instead of replacing them farthest east, he flung them into the lake, where they floated idly.

"All this is my lease now, Placide!" cried André. "Get off, quick. Out—out and away from my stakes, you."

Many pirogues had drawn near, for this was something new. Not even Placide Dumaine, thought the fleet, would allow himself to be evicted in so summary a fashion. But to the disgust of every man there Placide drew up his anchor and, starting his engine, backed out beyond the stake line where he brought his schooner to anchor again. Sitting down in the bow of the trim little vessel, he watched idly while the others, in eloquent silence, returned to their day's work.

André Chotard was in his element. The triumph had been so open and had followed so closely upon the heels of the scene that had been enacted before Père Maurin's church that he could not resist the opportunity to show off.

"Tha's right, Placide," he mocked. "You stay right there an' watch. I like you to see good. Then, when you go back to town, you can get a job in the canning factory with the other girls, *hein?* You won't buy no dresses for 'Riette now, Placide. But mebby you buy 'em for yourself, I think."

André Chotard had cast off his rough clothing and had donned his faded trunks. Laughing boisterously, he propelled his cypress pirogue to what had been Placide's leasehold.

"Jus' watch, Placide! You keep your eye on me," he jeered. "Ma'm'selle Placide, you ain't 'fraid about being out in Lake Chien with all the men?"

He stood poised for an instant in the slender dugout. Before he could dive, Placide arose.

"André Chotard," he called, "I'm warn you, don' dive on my oyster bed. You bring up my oysters and you die."

The surprize of it held André spell bound for an instant. There were no spectators to the tense little drama, for all of the oystermen were busied about their work and there were none near enough to hear.

"Eh?"

"I tell you, André Chotard, if you dive for my oysters, you die!"

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André relaxed and laughed contemptuously.

"Now I will show you, Ma'm'selle Placide," he called out. "I'm dive for your oysters right now, and, when I get plenty oysters, know what I do; I come over to your schooner and throw you out."

Gracefully and noiselessly he slipped into the dimpled water. As he did so, Placide leaped for the engine housing and started his motor. One frantic jerk threw the engine into gear. He had backed the boat in leaving his leasehold a few minutes previously, so that it was not necessary for him to make a turn. Straight forward the little schooner darted, but the instant she had gained momentum and was headed for the spot where André had disappeared, Placide threw out the clutch, locked the wheel and allowed the vessel to coast over the water.

A hurried scramble and he was leaning far overside, with his long-handled oyster tongs ready. Not for nothing had he marked the exact spot where André's body had parted the waters in his dive. The dragging tongs encountered soft resistance. Then they were all but jerked from Placide's grasp as something below the surface of the water seized them. Fortunately the little schooner had lost its momentum by that time. Holding grimly, Placide tugged and tugged on the long-handled tongs until the schooner swung idly as if at anchor.

And then, with straining muscles, Placide drew the tongs upward foot by foot, until the distorted features of André Chotard appeared above the surface of the water. Less than two minutes had elapsed since André's dive, but the big oysterman was nearly spent. For a moment he hung to the tongs grimly, gagging and coughing, breathing deeply of the sweet pure air. Bending far over, Placide grasped André's wrist. Tugging manfully, he raised the gasping André the few inches more that were needed to enable him to catch hold of the schooner's gunwale.

Leaving him there, Placide sat himself down a few feet away, wiped the beads of moisture from his forehead and grinned pleasantly at André.

"Eh, what I tell you, André Chotard?" he asked ever so gently.

But André Chotard was in no condition to speak. Only the expression of his eyes showed the agony through which he had passed, and through which, indeed, he was still passing.

"You goin' throw me out of my schooner André?"

The big oysterman shook his head violently.

"Tha's nice, André. Tha's mighty nice. And now listen, André. Listen to me good."

André made a straining effort to draw himself farther from the water.

"Placide! Placide!" he gasped. "My hand, she's slip off quick. I can't hold on much—Placide—I——"

"Sure," agreed Placide. "And if I take 'way my schooner, you stay right here, eh? So listen good. You promise me you keep off my oyster beds, André, and you promise me how you goin' back with me to 'Riette and tell 'Riette you ain't never goin' bother her or me no more. You do that, and I fix you so you get up on my boat right now. You don' promise that, and I start my boat and go 'way. You understand, André Chotard?"

"Quick—quick—Placide! I promise anything—only quick!"

"You know what you got to do? You understand?"

André's face was purpling with the effort he was making to retain his one-handed hold on the schooner's gunwale. He could not speak, but the affirmative emphasis he gave to his nods left nothing to be desired.

Placide moved over to him, seizing a length of line. This he slipped under André's armpits in a deft loop, making the free end fast to one of the bitts. With something between a groan and a sigh, André loosened the cramped hold of his fingers; then his big body relaxed in a dead faint. When he came to he was stretched out on the schooner's deck and Placide was trying to force a little brandy between his teeth. He was shaking, as from a severe chill, when he made his way back to his own schooner, where he passed the afternoon in the cabin.

LATE that night, after the glowing fires of many charcoal pots had died into darkness, Placide got into his pirogue. He took his long-handled tongs and with these he worked busily over his oyster beds. When the fleet stirred into activity the next morning at daybreak, Placide Dumaine's schooner and André Chotard's lugger-built vessel were both gone.

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When they reached town that afternoon the oystermen saw André's boat moored to one of the canning company's wharves. Placide's schooner they did not see because at that moment Placide's schooner was coming to anchor in Bayou La Peur, where with a shout Placide summoned the trapper from his cabin.

"Well?" asked Achille.

Placide nodded eloquently.

"And—and—Achille," he stammered, "we like—me an' 'Riette—we like you—to come—nex' Sunday—to Père Maurin's church. We—uh—'Riette, she's goin' get married to me nex' Sunday, and we both ask you to come see us getting married," he finished with a rush.

"Sure, I'll be there," grinned the big trapper. "And mebbe I bring 'Riette some fine mink pelt for a cloak. Tha's what will be my wedding-gift."

Achille, still smiling, pointed to a tarpaulin-covered heap on the deck of the little schooner.

"You bring him back all right, eh?" he asked.

Placide nodded.

"All but only two," he replied. "I bring you plenty for those two nex' time I'm come from town."

Achille grinned in understanding. In the meantime Placide had removed the tarpaulin and had begun to pass ashore to Achille the powerful, steel mink traps which lay in a great heap on the trim little schooner's deck.

THE LEPER COLONY OF CULION

by GEORGE GATLIN

THREE thousand men would cry
"Unclean!"
Were they bound by Levitical bond,
Three thousand lepers waiting death,
On the Island of Culion.

Bamboo and palms to shelter them,
Exiled there whence none can flee;
The leper island lies among
The thousand isles of the China Sea.

Three thousand men who wistful look,
On holy ground where peace is sure,
Three thousand lepers pray release
In a merciful death—the only cure.

Bamboo and palms to shelter them,
Deadlines mark where they are free;
The forbidden city lies half-hid,
Across the world on the China Sea.

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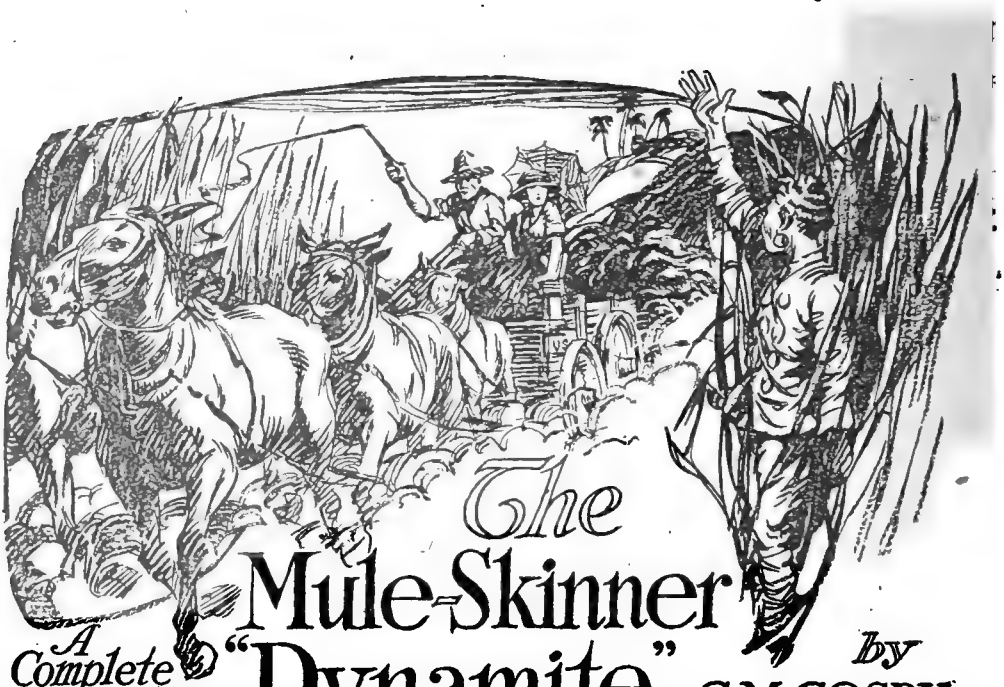

The Mule-Skinner "Dynamite"

A Complete Novelette

by C·M·COSBY

Author of "Dan of the Sword," "The Bone-Breaker," etc.

THOUGH it is generally conceded that the sources of wisdom are catholic and manifold, one scarcely looks to find a well of truth in a red-headed mastodon of a mule-skinner whose own boot-leg whisky has brought him to the verge of tears. Yet it was truth and pure wisdom that the big fellow uttered as he crouched over the dice on the brink of a high tableland in blood-stained Mindanao, the abrupt slope of which was bathed in the radiance of a new day that had shown first on the higher mountain-tops beyond the deep valley of the Argus River. That the truth fell at the time on heedless ears is beside the question.

"I'm a plumb fool!" exclaimed the mule-skinner, Joseph J. Kerrigan, otherwise known as "Handsome Joe," or "Red." "If I'd married that little gal I'd be at home now, with two sons and a bee-yootiful little daughter callin' me daddy, instead o' shootin' craps on this God-forsaken island with a bunch o' tramps, and the *goo-goos* layin' out there in the grass, mos' likely, ready to cyarve the flesh off my bones, and split the bones, after I've trimmed you suckers.

"I ast you: What is the use o' money, when you ain't got none t' spend it on but yore own lousy self, and likely to have those meat-cleavin' *barongs* and *krises* bitin' into yore bones mos' any minute? It ain't the life for a decent, self-appreciatin' man, I say."

Kerrigan, one of a group of eight men who stood or squatted in a crude circle between the precipitous brink of the table-land and the back wall of the camp corral at Marahui, Mindanao, P. I., drew the back of a great hairy paw across bloodshot blue eyes and stared off across the eighteen miles of country that dropped step by step to the coral strands of Iligan Bay.

The group, a motley one composed of two soldiers in uniform and six civilian teamsters, two of them negroes, and most of them ex-soldiers, stirred uneasily, little affected by Kerrigan's rather gruesome reference to the fate that lurks always in the jungles of Mindanao, but keenly alive to the identity of the man, himself, and the fact he was delaying the game. Only one of the group showed no sign of concern, a graceful young teamster with the build of a welter-weight and the eyes of a Norse Viking. Instead, a certain quizzical amusement showed in those war-like blue eyes and in the twist of the lips.

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And it was to this young man—he looked thirty-five or forty years of age, though not yet twenty-eight—that the older men looked for intervention. Too young as yet to show marked signs of brutality or hardness, his face, nevertheless, was full even now of mature, aggressive force, with a certain reckless hardihood standing out as boldly conspicuous as the nose on his face. The eyes of the man, the nose, the firm jaw and chin set by nature at a fighting angle, formed a group of features to command attention anywhere. The poise of the head was enough in itself to compel a second look. As an old sergeant had said of Donald Macdonald in his recruit days:

"A bird like that don't need to fight much. The wicked eyes of him is a fair discourager of argument. But when he does fight—look out!"

"There is a devil in the man," a captain of police had complained after a man's size riot on Manila's gay Luneta.

"Seven devils and a whirlwind," grunted a sergeant who nursed a broken nose.

Both sergeants, police and soldier, had been right. Macdonald had fought little, but his reputation, if surpassed at all, was second only to that of Kerrigan. Ordinarily, Kerrigan was quicker to seek trouble, and his methods were rough enough to suit the roughest on these outer fringes of the world, but when Macdonald fought, men "looked out." The men looked to him now to curb Kerrigan's jeremiad and renew the game. Macdonald, when he did speak, spoke quietly, but there was jeer and sneer in every word.

"What's the idea, Handsome? You talk like a millionaire or a holy Joe. Nobody to spend money on but yourself. What's the matter—tired of the yellow and brown?"

The great head of Kerrigan, thatched with the brightest of red hair, moved slowly on a bull neck that fitted the heavy face and the coarse but powerful features. The nickname, Handsome, had never been more ridiculously inappropriate than at this moment of retrospective melancholy. Instead of the half-expected ferocity his light blue eyes were filled with a great sadness.

"You're still a kid," boomed Kerrigan. "When you are goin' on forty, as I am, you'll know the difference 'twix' the yellow and brown, as you call 'em, and the real article. If I was yore age, young un, I'd be headin' back t' God's country if I had t' swim. You're the only man in this crowd got a butterfly's chance o' wingin' outta hell. We're too old and we been over here too long. It's got us. But you—you could go back an' make a man out o' yo'self, an' a nice little home, instead o' a blankety blank rum-guzzlin' hellion. My Gawd! I wish I had yore chance. If I'd only married the gal!"

And the bad man of the Philippines laid the dice on the ground and burst into tears, to the embarrassment of all save Macdonald.

"Cut the mush," snapped Macdonald. "Pick up them bones and roll 'em or pass 'em along."

Kerrigan looked up quickly without troubling to wipe tears from face and eyes. "All right," he snarled, "if you want blood I'll give you buckets of it, either with bones or fist. And I state right here that you'll be goin' back soon, or you'll live to wish you had, and to whine like I done. It's more 'an any blankety blank son of a sheep-stealin' Scotchman could make me do."

Macdonald's eyes narrowed slightly and a flicker of new light showed plainly, half amusement, half cold anger.

"I," he stated in cold, crisp, even tones, "am regulatin' my own movements and amusements. When I want blood I'll take it, with bones or fist, and when I want to go back to the States, I'll go, whether I'm old or young. At present the islands suit me first rate. I ain't exactly pinin' for that real article you speak of. I got a prejudice against bein' tied to a skirt that expects constant attention, and a bill o' particulars regardin' spare time. I'll state too, in passin', that this gal you are cryin' about, the mother o' your mightta-been children, is probably well cared for now—in a lunatic asylum, if she ever thought o' marryin' you."

Kerrigan glared at Macdonald; then—

"I wouldn't get no credit f' beatin' you up," he sneered.

"No?" jeered the other. "I'm not exactly a heavy-weight, but think of the disgrace if I smeared you. And paste this in your bonnet, Handsome: I'm a heavy-weight so far as you are concerned any blankety blank time you want to hook up—*sabe?*"

It looked for a moment as if Kerrigan might elect to hook up right then and

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there; as if the long expected might resolve immediately into open warfare. But Kerrigan turned finally to the dice with a snorted oath.

SMALL piles of money, both coin and bills, were heaped here and there, and the gamesters, for the most part, were rather glad that this fight of fights had been deferred. Money was plentiful for this corner of the world, and the men were eager for it, even though, as Kerrigan had pointed out, they spent it wildly and derived no benefit therefrom. Soldier and teamster, they were equally keen to test luck and skill, moved by the common spring of avarice and the human love of chance. The soldiers had just been paid and several of the teamsters had reaped small fortunes in the sale of smuggled whisky at seven, eight, even ten dollars a quart.

"Come, you seven!" chanted Kerrigan; "lady o' mine needs a new pair o' shoes."

With a long sweep of the arm Kerrigan sent the dice running and jumping after the needed shoes. But it was double-six that turned up, a losing point.

"Craps!" yelled the larger of the two negro teamsters, raking in a neat pile of bills and coins with an eager hand. "I jes' natcherly knowed you couldn't do it. Trouble 'ith you white men, you don' know how t' talk to the bones."

"Wha'd'yu mean, I don't know how t' talk t' the bones?" Kerrigan demanded savagely.

"Now Handsome, I don' mean nothin' onpleasant," the negro retorted arnestly. "Can't you take no skylarkin' a-tall?"

"Sure, Sam, you're all right," Kerrigan conceded. "It's them blankety blank dice. But what more could you expect, bein' owned by a thievin' Scotchman. Gimme 'em."

Kerrigan took the dice in the palm of a mitt-like hand, spat upon them deliberately and sent them sailing straight at the face of the sun that had climbed out of the bay by now and was bathing the chill heights of Marahui in a dazzling radiance that would have them smoking hot by noon. The dice dropped beyond the brink of the table-land and went rattling down the steep slope toward the tortuous cañon where the river raged four hundred feet below, sending up a constant roar of rushing, tumbling water. Macdonald was squatted on one heel. He did not stir, but he spoke sharply.

"That'll cost you one dollar," he said.

"How are you goin' t' get it?" jeered Kerrigan.

"There are two ways," Macdonald retorted quietly; "you can give it to me, or I'll take it out of your blankety blank hide first, and your pocket afterward."

"You will, eh?" roared Kerrigan. "Well, go to it, kid, and God have mercy on you."

Before the last word was out of his mouth Kerrigan was reeling back under the impact of 145 pounds of bone and muscle launched from a kneeling posture in a panther-like spring. Macdonald, built to strike as a mule is to kick, was striking wickedly, viciously, while Kerrigan covered as best he could, seeking an opportunity to fight back.

Though much taller, longer of reach and heavier by seventy pounds, it looked for a moment as if the giant, completely surprized by the suddenness of the attack, would be swept off his feet and decisively beaten in the first fierce onslaught, for to lose one's feet in a fight of mule-skinners or lumberjacks is to court death and usually insure defeat. Already blood was trickling from Kerrigan's nose, both lips were cut and a bruise on the point of the chin testified to a blow that would have ended the fight for a lesser man.

Just as the big fellow seemed beaten, however, his broad back collided with the skinned saplings that formed the back wall of the stable. Twice the back of his head smashed against them as Macdonald pressed the attack, and once Kerrigan winced from a body blow, but the big fellow, his equilibrium thus luckily restored, reached through the shower of blows and laid ponderous hands on his lighter adversary, dragging Macdonald into a rib-cracking embrace.

Thrice Kerrigan surged, left, right, left, and with each surge Macdonald was lifted bodily and flung toward the ground, but each time he landed, cat-like, on the balls of his feet and, on the fourth repetition, burst free of his dangerous situation by deft use of knee, foot and hand. However, he did not win free unpunished. Besides aching ribs and back, he received a smashing blow in the moment of the break. The fact that he was moving with the blow, not against it, probably saved him a broken neck.

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Even so, it would have ended the fight then and there except for the fact that Macdonald saw it launched for the chin and ducked instinctively. Instead of reaching the chin the great fist smashed against the forehead over the left eye, sending Macdonald end over end. It could scarcely be called a clean knock-out, however, for the end of that wild tumble found Macdonald on his feet and flying back to meet Kerrigan almost in the moment he wiped the blood from his eyes. As the two charged, however, a man carrying a drover's whip thrust between them, roaring a command.

"I'll brain the first that crowds me," the newcomer announced, wagging the club in a lean, sinewy hand. "Can't you two find trouble enough 'thout murderin' each other? How'm I gonna get them wagons down if you're all beat up?"

It was the wagon-master, William Sheridan, who had intervened. He turned on Kerrigan with a half angry, half complaining:

"I bet you started this, Red. I gotta a good mind t' find out what you carry inside that thing you call a head."

Kerrigan stoutly disclaimed responsibility, stating bitterly:

"I did nothing o' the kind, Bill Sheridan. I was complaining about these here blankety blank islands and that fist-fall o' murderin' violence goes off slap-bang in my face. I'm goin' to break him up some and throw him after his blankety blank dice."

"Well," replied Sheridan, "whoever's t' blame, I want you boys to cut it out and promise me not to start nothing more till we get down to Overton, anyway. Besides getting them mules and wagons down, I got a special reason for askin' it."

"I'll promise you nothin', Bill," Macdonald announced in tones of quiet, cold finality. "I started out t' collect a dollar from Handsome and I'm sure goin' t' do it, right here and now or first time you are out o' sight."

"You gotta fat chance," jeered Kerrigan.

" 'Dynamite,' " chided Sheridan—that being Macdonald's *nom de guerre*—"I got a special job for you an' fightin' don't go—*sabe?* Not this side o' Overton. What the ——'s this about collectin' a dollar, anyway?"

Macdonald told him, with caustic asides from Kerrigan. When the telling was done, Sheridan turned to Kerrigan.

"Handsome," he said, "give 'im a dollar."

"What?" roared Kerrigan.

"Give 'im a dollar," Sheridan repeated, tipping him a sly wink and a grin; "it'll be worth it. I got a special job for Dynamite and I can't afford to have his beauty spiled. He's gonna take a passenger down."

"Wha'd'yu mean, a passenger?" Macdonald demanded.

Now an old gray wolf was Sheridan in a job where one had to be both warrior and diplomat.

"Why, it's this way, son. Colonel O'Toole has a niece up here; been visitin' a spell; sister o' Lieutenant Courtney o' this post, and she's set her heart on goin' back to her worshipful ol' uncle in a freight-wagon instead o' goin' spring-wagon express.

"Naw, Dynamite—don't say it!" Sheridan suddenly cautioned. "I know just what's in your mind: White women got no business in this country. What I said myself; but I seen that little girl and I don't mind tellin' you she made a hit with me, old as I am. I mightta had a little daughter about her age if I had had any sense when I was younger."

"Look out!" yelled Kerrigan, with a great show of mock alarm. "The kid will sure slough you for that. That's what made him go off in my face."

"As I was sayin'," Sheridan continued, with a glare at Kerrigan, "that little kid made a hit with me and any loose talk is goin' t' make me see red. Now Dynamite, you can be a pretty wicked youngster when you like, but a bleat out o' you about that kid an' you an' I'll sure lock horns."

"I already got one scare-crow to lick," Macdonald retorted, grinning. "I ain't no hawg. But I do say this, Bill Sheridan: Neither you nor Colonel Blankety Blank O'Toole, nor any other blankety blank two-legged man is goin' t' unload any skirt on my hands—unless she is a kid. How old is this dame?"

Sheridan led him aside.

"I could lie t' you," he said, "but I know you are that mulish you'd as leave balk when she was climbin' in the wagon. She's about twenty-two or twenty-three, I judge, and—wait a minute now—pretty as a picter. But that ain't what I'm drivin' at. This may mean my job. There ain't another mule-skinner in the train I could pair her with. They'd go crabbin' the game somehow—cussin', or

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somethin' else; but you, Dynamite—you can act like a gentleman when you're a mind to."

"Thanks," said Macdonald dryly.

"I mean it; it's in you. Any fool could see that. I want you to do this as a personal favor t' me."

"All right—all right, I'll do it if you put it that way," Macdonald consented with unexpected readiness and turned toward the group of interrupted crap shooters.

The readiness reminded Sheridan of something.

"Now, Handsome," he admonished, "you come across with that dollar."

"Them dice warn't worth a dollar," Kerrigan objected sullenly.

"Dice an' whisky," Sheridan said slowly, "come high in these here interior altichudes. If whisky is worth ten dollars a quart I don't reckon one dollar is any outrageous valuation on a pair o' dice."

"Oh, you're wise, are you?" sneered Kerrigan. "Then I guess I better give this chile what he's cryin' for."

And he suited the action to the word by contemptuously spinning a silver dollar toward Macdonald. Macdonald picked it up, spat upon it, as Kerrigan had spat upon the dice, and hurled it after them.

"We," he said, "are even now, thanks t' Sheridan, but I ain't aimin' t' let anybody settle my affairs. When the teams are stalled I'm goin' t' take it out o' your hide, Handsome—on principle—I'm warnin' you now."

"Oh, you are, are you?" jeered Kerrigan. "I'll be there son; you won't need t' send no bloodhounds out."

"Whoever heard o' a mule-skinner fightin' for principle?" Sheridan cut in jocosely in an effort to pacify.

"You'll hear o' one tomorrow, an' see one, too, if you stick around," Macdonald retorted.

AN HOUR later Macdonald, wearing a big sombrero, blue shirt, khaki trousers and army shoes, lounged near his wagon in the open space before the post headquarters building, idly flicking a quarter out of the parched grass with the lash of his blacksnake. The collar of his flannel shirt was open at the throat, the sleeves rolled up above the elbows, and every movement of hand or arm brought into swift, fascinating play the rippling muscles of the powerful forearm.

The whip cracked sharply and the coin sprang into an open palm. As Macdonald turned to reassure his team, a young woman appeared in the doorway of the headquarters building, followed by a half dozen men in uniform, all Army officers.

Macdonald ignored the party. He resented the girl and the trick that had thrust her upon him on terms of such inequality. He had enlisted when he was twenty years old; he had been in the Philippines since he was twenty-one, so that young white women were something of a mystery to him. Surprized and angered by a jumble of unforeseen emotions, Macdonald gave free rein to the devils of recklessness within him and they danced in his hard, shining eyes.

"I say, fellow!" exclaimed a second lieutenant. "Are you the man who is to drive Miss Courtney to Overton?"

Macdonald turned toward the speaker slowly and stared so long that the latter demanded—

"Did you hear me speak to you?"

Whereat Macdonald stared a moment longer and said calmly:

"You win. I'm the guy. But how'd you guess it, with me only standin' out here three-quarters of an hour waitin' for the lady?"

"What?" demanded the young officer; but before he could gather his outraged wits to deal with this amazing piece of impudence, Colonel Brown, the post commander intervened.

He eyed Macdonald shrewdly, but with a certain grim humor showing through narrowed lids.

"What's your name?" he snapped.

"Donald Macdonald," drawled Macdonald.

"See that you deliver this young lady safely at Overton," charged the colonel. "You have a cavalry escort and the Moros are quiet. Careful driving will do it." And then, to the girl, "You had better be off, my dear. Hard road going down; almost as slow as it is coming up."

The young woman stepped forward.

"That's an awkward climb," said the colonel. "You climb up, Macdonald, and we'll pass her to you."

"No need," drawled Macdonald and before any one realized what he was about had seized her by the waist with his two hands and had swung her to the platform,

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where she stared down, amazement, anger, amusement, all struggling for place in such eyes as Macdonald had never seen before.

As an exhibition of strength it was superb, but it was hardly the thing for a mule-skinner to do. It was for this very reason that Macdonald, more than ordinarily bitter by reason of this thrusting upon him of class distinction, had done it, and not to parade his strength.

"By gracious!" the young woman's brother, a tall, lean, manly looking young man, exclaimed as he strode quickly forward.

But again Colonel Brown intervened.

"There was no need of that, either," the colonel informed Macdonald in cold, even tones. "Hereafter, young man, when you must show off, do so in the corral or the warehouse, where perhaps it is appreciated."

Macdonald voiced no reply, but the wickedness of the glance he shot at the grim old colonel spoke for him. He swung to the seat, seized the lines; the quirt writhed over the backs of the mules with a great hissing and a sharp crack of the lash, and the journey had begun to the coast camp beyond the grass flats of Pantar, of Mimungun, and those densely wooded slopes overhanging Iligan Bay.

"There goes a strong man hell-bent for the devil," said Colonel Brown.

The empty wagon literally jumped after straining mules and rounded a sharp curve further down the slope, to bring up on two wheels with a rattle and bang in front of ten other wagons, waiting where the juncture of the corral and the headquarters roads joined the main trail. Sheridan rode up, face flushed with anger.

"Say, wha'd'yu think this is?" demanded Sheridan. "A chariot race? You cut that stuff out. Get me?"

"I get you," retorted Macdonald. "Now you get me, Sheridan! I'm drivin' this team; if you want t' drive it, climb up."

Sheridan glared for a moment, then grinned.

"Say, Mac," he said, "you come over here a minute. I want t' have a little heart t' heart talk with you.

"Say, son," Sheridan began, "what's gettin' into you? I knew you could be right wicked when you'd a min' to, but I never see you cut up like this before. What I want t' tell you is this: You ain't doin' me any favor drivin' that lady down if you're goin' t' break her neck or scare her t' death doin' it. What's eatin' you, anyway?" And then, as a light dawned, "Say, kid, did that big leatherneck get under your skin with his frau and fireside talk? You ain't gettin' homesick?"

"Homesick, ——!" Macdonald exploded. "I got no home. Home is where I hang my hat. Why in blankety blank blank should I be homesick?'

His tone was bitter, but suddenly his mood changed and his face lighted with a broad, frank grin. It was cynical yet warm and charged with a strong and definite appeal. It was full of impudence and deviltry.

"No reason, though, why I should get sore at you, eh, Sherry?" Macdonald suggested. "You're a white man. I told you I'd take her down, and I'll take her down right. But I don't mind denyin' I ain't thrilled with this business o' bein' coachman to a bunch o' muslin. Talkin' my head off, mos' likely, all the way; tryin' t' reform me or find out whose noble, wayward son I am."

Sheridan grinned as Macdonald strode grimly back to his wagon.

"There's a boy that's homesick an' don't know it," Sheridan reflected. "Either that or he won't admit it. Somethin' hit him hard when he was young an' tender, an' he's been racin' the devil ever since, what with spite, or disapp'intment, or somethin'. Too bad! More man in him than there is in a carload o' ordinary mule-skinners. He'll stay out here until he's wicked as a rattlesnake. An' he's a likeable kid, too, in spite o' his hair-trigger violence. I hope that gal don't talk his ear off, but he's probably right. She's too dang pretty t' be reas'nable."

But Sheridan was mistaken in the girl, even as MacDonald was in for a surprize. Could either have looked six hours ahead they would have wasted less time on minor prophecy. Not being blessed, or cursed, with second-sight, Macdonald waited with mounting interest for the frenzied small talk that was to blight his ear. For the first mile no word was spoken. The personality of this man, and particularly his audacity in handling her, had suggested caution.

First Macdonald wondered, then resented, and finally gave in to the stirring

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of a certain dour curiosity. In the first half mile Macdonald, with a rather ostentatious show of relish, had chewed a large piece from a sodden plug molded to the curve of the body by heat and perspiration. He had been prompted partly by desire for the chew and partly by a rather boyish desire to show his independence of "form" and his contempt for feminine fastidiousness.

In the end he grinned slightly, then straightened his face and glanced at the girl beside him. He was struck by her profile. Framed in the hollow of a green silk parasol that tilted rakishly over a large leghorn straw hat, she presented a wonderful picture. But it was the profile that struck Macdonald. He realized with a sudden queer leap of the heart how a man might fall in love with a profile at sight; might go to hell for it, or heaven. And the thought merely increased his bitterness.

From the profile he passed to single feature; to the well-molded chin proudly poised above a perfectly rounded, graceful neck, and finally to a dainty little ear nestling half-hidden in a tantalizing shimmer of auburn hair. Macdonald turned from that disturbing inspection with a sharp command to his mules. When he turned back he had parted with his quid.

"May I smoke?" he asked, merely to start conversation, for he was bitterly curious to find out whether this woman was the gay and giddy thing she seemed.

"By all means," she replied rather coolly, without spoiling the profile by the slightest turn of her head. "I am rather fond of smoke," she added.

"Meaning that you don't care particularly for chewing," Macdonald suggested, with an unexpected show of wit that surprized his companion.

"I can't say it exactly attracts me," she said with the same coolness.

MACDONALD shrugged slightly and turned to his mules. This time three miles of dust had been raised and left behind—all not accumulated by the following train—before conversation was resumed. And this time it was the young woman who broke silence, after admitting to herself with secret amusement that she had underestimated the stubborn pride of this strange young ruffian.

"Have you been in this country long?" she inquired.

"Don't I act it?" Macdonald countered bluntly, his young face stern but the flicker of a smile in his eyes.

The girl could not see his eyes. She bit her lip to repress the laughter that bubbled up. It was her turn now to study profiles, and she glanced at the bold strong features under a hat almost as wide as her own and almost as rakishly tilted. It was picturesque, to say the least. Finally she answered his question.

"You are—how shall I put it? Well, rather abrupt—untamed. That was an exceedingly rude thing you did when we were leaving, for instance. But for Colonel Brown, I do believe my brother would have thrashed you."

A sudden grin, not altogether humor, twisted Macdonald's lips, but he did not comment on the young woman's intimation that he had narrowly missed a thrashing.

"It was the quickest way," he said simply. "We were late—and I knew you wouldn't break."

"That's not a very nice apology," she pointed out. "I must say you make very little effort to be gallant."

"I'm not gallant," Macdonald retorted dryly; "I'm just a plain ordinary, ornery mule-skinner."

"Oh, but you are not! You have intelligence, courage, force. At least you have animal courage. Too much of it, I imagine. There can be too much of it, you know, when a man has temper and makes no effort to control it. You may be—well, to put it bluntly, a rather brutal mule-skinner, but an ordinary one—never!"

It had been on the tip of Macdonald's tongue to say, "The —— you say!" Instead he demanded rather slangily but with the utmost soberness and surprize—

"Say, Miss—Miss——"

"Miss Courtney—Shirley Courtney," she helped him out.

"Miss Courtney, where do you get that stuff?"

"Why, you are quite a celebrity, Mr. Dynamite Macdonald. The world out here is rather circumscribed, you know. I've heard a lot about you. How you burned a house in Iligan, for instance, standing off the fire department with a club or a plank or something, because some one in the house had stolen your

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meerschaum pipe—or you thought they had."

"Who told you that?" Macdonald demanded fiercely.

"Why—why—" the young woman stammered, confused and somewhat startled; "why I don't know. It's common gossip."

"Too common for you to hear or repeat," he charged her sternly; adding more quietly, but with bitterness, "I didn't know my reputation had gotten past the servants' quarters."

"Oh, yes! I believe most of the officers, the younger ones especially, admire you in a way."

"In a way is good," Macdonald retorted dryly.

She ignored that.

"Why," she demanded, "are you so upset by a mere reference to your—your little flyer in arson?"

"Because—" he began, looked at her a moment, then looked away. "Isn't it enough for you to know I'm ashamed of it; that I came mighty close to Bilibid, or worse, that time? For I'd never have gone to Bilibid. I was drunk. Isn't that enough?"

"No," she replied; "if you wish me to stop talking about it, you will have to tell me why you are ashamed."

"Well, it wasn't—it wasn't a nice house."

"What kind of house was it?"

"It," he began uncomfortably; then, stopping the deft play of hand and whip, he looked at her squarely. "It," he finished roughly, "was a house you shouldn't know anything about. Now talk about something else."

"I won't talk about anything if you are going to be a bear," she retorted crossly and looked away to hide the vague smile that belied her tone; adding spitefully as an afterthought, however, "You are ridiculously old-fashioned despite your cave-man pose."

A moment later she glanced at him slyly. For a space she pondered this new and amusing specimen of man.

"Mr. Mule-Skinner," she mused, "there is more of mystery about you than shows in those smoldering blue eyes. In other days you might have fitted in most anywhere from gladiator to patrician, from swashbuckling courtier to wild Highland chief, but now—now I can't seem to classify you. You have the eyes of an eagle, the nose of a leader of men, the jaw and chin of a fighter, the heart of a child or a knight errant and the manners of—of a mule-skinner. I wonder how much of the latter is due to environment and how much to affectation?"

Then to herself, mischievously, for Macdonald's benefit:

"I have taken my fun where I've found it,
I've ranged and I've rogued in my time."

Macdonald glanced at her sharply, suspicious. Was she trying to kid him? As he weighed this, she jumped to the end of the poem:

"And the end of it's sitting and thinking, and dreaming hell-fires to see,
So be warned by my lot (which I know you will not) and learn about women from me."

Miss Courtney was staring straight ahead, but Macdonald was well within her range of vision, nevertheless. Macdonald, too, had been looking to the front after that first sharp glance. Now he picked up the ball that she had thrown and returned it with a peculiar emphasis that struck the young woman as rather bitterly sarcastic than suggestive:

"But I wouldn't do such, for I liked her too much,
And I learned about women from her."

Miss Courtney flushed slightly, flashed him a look, mostly amusement and triumphant accusation, but in which there was a trace of coquetry.

"So you know Kipling," she charged.

"Everything he ever wrote, I reckon."

"But how much better, 'I sing of arms and the man.'"

"Not for me," Macdonald retorted. "I never liked that guy after the way he treated that queen—Dado, or Dodo, or whatever her name was. I believe in a square break for woman or man—when they are square."

Miss Courtney smiled. She was merely thinking that this young mule-skinner was far more interesting than she had fancied any mule-skinner, young or old, could be, but Macdonald saw the smile and it embittered him the more, though he made no comment. She ran on with her own thoughts, unconscious of this chance impression.

The thoughts were rather bewildering. She had expected to find one of Jack

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London's abysmal types, a man of quick temper and sluggish mind; a sleeping volcano, as violent when aroused, as unreasoning and as uncontrolled; a man whose mind was limited to the sheer brutalities of the fundamental. Instead she had found one whose wit was by no means slow and whose temper, though undoubtedly violent, was probably under firm control.

She had a feeling that if this man allowed his temper to run loose it would be because he willed it so. Her eyes rested on the bruised flesh of forehead and eye, and she realized with some surprize that a black eye in this remarkable person, whether from the deeper setting of the eye or a war-like something in the countenance, did not seem the ludicrous thing it frequently does.

"You had a fall?" she suggested, wilfully ignoring the conventional.

"Yes," Macdonald admitted dryly, grinning a little; "after I was hit."

"You were fighting?" she asked, pretending surprize; and then, "I didn't suppose any one in Mindanao could have done that—unless it might be the man called Handsome Joe."

"There he is," Macdonald stated, indicating.

The young woman glanced back and as promptly looked away with an exclamation of horror and disgust. For the first time she felt distinct repulsion for this man who could batter another so frightfully and then callously call attention to it.

"Why, you nearly killed him!" she exclaimed.

"Not near enough to suit me," Macdonald said simply; and, as she seemed to expect an explanation, "He did this after all that happened to him."

"Then you didn't whip him!" she cried.

"Whip him!" retorted Macdonald. "Why, we had just begun to fight when Sherry butted in."

The young woman shook her head, and as she shook it a Moro stepped into the road out of the high grass that walled it on either side.

II

THE wagon-train by this time was well out on the plain of Mimungun, the cavalry escort riding guard in two groups of four each, front and rear. Another hour and it would be on the densely wooded coastal ridge overlooking the bay. This ridge seems little more than a slight elevation from the grass-choked Mimungun side, but from its wooded crown it drops steeply into the sea. Where the road tops it to the nearest point of bay shore is little more than two miles in a straight line, yet this is increased to about five miles by the long diagonals of the winding road. The course of the road may be judged by the fact that a foot-trail made by the Moros and their pack-ponies cuts the road at three points in its straighter course down the mountainside.

By road, the head of the wagon-train was some nine miles from Camp Overton when the Moro stepped out of the rank growth of giant jungle grass—*coganal*—which towered above him. His appearance occasioned neither surprize nor alarm. Moros are no uncommon sight, even in Iligan, the Filipino coast town beyond Camp Overton, and they constantly use the Iligan-Lanao military road.

Furthermore, both guard and guarded were steeped in that sublime cocksureness typical of the adventurously inclined American and were lulled to lethargic carelessness by the heat that seems to gather actual weight, as it does intensity, in the swift drop from the higher altitudes of Marahui and Lake Lanao. But the confidence of soldier and teamster—most of the latter ex-soldiers—was enough to account for the half contemptuous, half indifferent glance with which this lone Moro was greeted.

Americans had been slain, singly and by stealth, along this very strip of road, and that not infrequently, but the Moros had attempted no attack in force on this outer edge of their domain since the massacre of a Spanish regiment—Filipinos officered by Spaniards—some years before American soldiery took over this festering thorn in the flesh of Spain.

There was still another reason, having little weight with the ex-enlisted man, however: the Sultan of Mimungun was classed as friendly *hombre*.

As a matter of fact, though Miss Courtney regarded him with a certain creepy interest, there was nothing in this Moro to excite definite suspicion or alarm. A glance sufficed to show that he was not *juramentado*—blood mad—and only such are dangerous, ordinarily, to armed Americans in daylight. By his gaudy raiment and

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his ornate *kris*, the Moro obviously was a sub-chief, perhaps a *datto*. His hair, long, coarse and black, was coiled neatly on his head; his lips were scarlet from the juice of chewed betel and lime. In this blood-red frame his black teeth showed bizarre, revolting. He wore a short, tight-fitting jacket of brilliant red that matched the vivid lips, down the front of it a double row of silver buttons, and breeches to match, skin-tight below the knees. At his side was the carved and mounted *kris*. His head and feet were bare.

Certainly there was nothing in the man's lone bobbing up to create alarm. His greeting, too, was the greeting of cordial friendship. As he stepped into the road his hand was well away from the ornate hilt of his crooked-edged *kris;* his face was slashed by a grin that distorted the grotesque features and showed the unnatural teeth. A moment he stood thus, as the lead mules of Macdonald's six-line team swung past him, then raised one hand and shouted in a loud voice—

"*Mapia pagaari!*" Moro equivalent of "top o' the mornin' to you."

Nothing to cause alarm, yet two things instantly struck Macdonald with the nerve-spurring force of an electric shock. In the first place, he did not like the loud voice in which the Moro proclaimed his friendship, but that merely caused him to speculate, eyes narrowed. The second thing, however, in the same fraction of time, caused him to act. The tail of his eye, or his ear, he was not quite sure which, had detected a faint rustle in the grass to the right. With the shock of that second suspicion he roared warning to those in front and behind.

"Duck for your lives," he roared and, roaring, wrapped his left arm about the woman beside him and tumbled backward into the body of the wagon.

Man and woman crashed to the floor and Miss Courtney lay for a moment too utterly amazed to be thoroughly frightened. It was later she realized this amazing mule-skinner had turned in falling, so that she fell uppermost. Later, too, she recalled that the air, immediately following that fall, had been filled with a great rustling of dry grass and a whistling of things thrown, followed immediately by shrieks, yells, curses, groans and the sound of spike-headed javelins striking on wood, metal, flesh.

At the moment she was only conscious that Macdonald had freed himself in the moment of impact, had staggered to his feet and was firing his .38 Colt in the face of the lone Moro at a pointblank range of inches as the Moro swung at his head with the wavy-edged *kris*. She saw the red flood of death blot out the features of the Moro; saw the *kris* fly from dead fingers, taking with it Macdonald's wide-brimmed hat; sprang to her feet and saw Moros boiling out of the jungle grass and filling the roadway. Then Macdonald thrust her down with no gentle hand, saying:

"Hug the floor, you little fool. This is no place for a white woman."

And even as he thrust her down she saw the heads of three Moros bob up over the wagon side with terrifying unison; saw Macdonald fire into the face of each; saw him turn his revolver on a fourth and pull the trigger without result, then send the weapon itself crashing into the face of the Moro, cursing himself the while for a witless fool in having fired two shots from the weapon the day before without troubling to reload it.

She saw Macdonald step nimbly back as the point of a bone-cleaving *barong* slit the shirt he wore and raked the flesh beneath; saw him stoop swiftly for a *barong* that had fallen into the body of the wagon from the hand of a dead Moro, and rise with it, swinging at the Moro who had slashed him and who now was almost in the wagon, one foot on the hub of a wheel, one over the wagon side. She saw the great blade of the two-handed sword cleave through flesh and bone; saw the head of the Moro leap from the body, mouth horribly agape, eyes glazed; saw the headless trunk totter for a ghastly fraction of a second and tumble backward; then tried to blot the horror from her eyes with shaking hands.

When she looked again the Moros had drawn back from that arc of dripping steel but already were beginning to circle the wagon with the obvious intention of attacking from all sides. As the groups melted in pursuance of this strategy, Macdonald flung the great sword into the thick of them. Quickly he turned with the sureness of a wild thing, caught her above the knees and, with one surge, had thrown her face down across his shoulder and was scrambling over the wagon seat. Before the Moros

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awoke to the meaning of this strange maneuver, Macdonald was standing on the wagon-tongue between the wheel mules and had lowered the woman to the tongue, where he seated her.

"Hold on to the trace," he shouted. "I'll get you out o' this if God Almighty will spare the mules. Pray for the mules. I'll do the rest."

As he spoke he brought the mule-skinner's whip into play. A dozen Moros were hanging to the bits of the frightened mules, almost as frightened as the mules themselves, for the Moro, though he covets the big animals of the *Americano*, fears them no less, much as the *Americano* fears the Moro *caribao*.

The knife-like lash of the quirt fell among the Moros, tearing at face, arm and shoulder, and wherever the lash fell a Moro screamed and drew back from the flesh-cutting sting of it. The whip writhed back and forth with the hiss of a great snake, and where it fell appeared a raw wound spouting blood. Almost in a moment the crack of the whip and the screams of the whipped all but drowned out other sounds.

Later Miss Courtney recalled seeing Kerrigan, surrounded by Moros and armed with an iron crow-bar—sometimes used in lieu of a jack—jump from his wagon into a bunched group and send them scattering with great smashing blows of his iron club, only to go down a moment later under what seemed to her stricken eyes as a flashing hell of hungry swords. And even as she stared, the face of a Moro bobbed up beyond the wagon-seat and through a veil of terror she saw that he pointed an army rifle at Macdonal .

She strangled on a scream that convulsed and tore her throat, stared at the eyes of the aiming man in a sort of horrible fascination, and then, as her ears were bursting with the sound of a report that would not come, she saw an awful red gash spring out in the place where eyes had been, saw the gun fall from hands that clutched suddenly at blind eyes, while the mouth behind those clutching hands shrieked incoherent animal agony.

This screaming creature, a man no longer, was thrust aside by a Moro who had recovered one of the thrown spears from the body of the wagon. He launched it at Macdonald even as he thrust his blinded comrade out of the way. The javelin flashed across the few feet between launcher and target like a giant arrow sped. Macdonald thrust it aside as a conjurer might have done and before the spear clattered to earth this second Moro clutched at his face with frantic hands and screamed.

NOW the Moro is a fighting man, every inch of him, taught from the cradle to bore in. A night fighter by preference, he is dangerous, nevertheless, at all times, impelled by nature, by religion and by the very nature of his weapons to carry edged steel to his enemy in hand to hand conflict. The bow and arrow he holds in contempt; a contempt amply justified by the ease with which he invariably prevails over the wild tribes who share with him the interior of Mindanao. However, the busy lash of this mad *Americano* presented a demoralizing problem. A Moro killed killing Christians goes to his Mohammedan heaven headlong on a snow-white charger, so it is taught. But the whip did not kill. It merely mutilated. And the mutilated live miserably here below and miserably hereafter.

This thought was emphasized by the screams of the Moros touched by that terrible lash. The two taken together had shaken Moro morale. It is one thing to die fighting; another to be blinded by the stroke of a whip. So the Moros reasoned. Meantime the mules were gaining headway, had broken through the scattering Moros and were drawing away. Macdonald climbed back to the wagon seat, carrying Miss Courtney under one arm, and placed her on the platform between his feet.

"You shouldn't carry me all the time," she protested. "I am strong and active. And I'd much rather be sharing your danger on the seat."

"No time for formality," he told her shortly.

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way!" she exclaimed. "I——"

"Never mind how you meant it," Macdonald retorted dryly; "just say nothing and sit tight."

Macdonald glanced back. The Moros were padding doggedly after, only pausing to gather thrown spears, and Macdonald knew there was good reason for the padding. Just ahead was a short level stretch of road in which the sand and dust lay hub-deep.

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Laden, the wagons crossed on planks laid, or behind doubled teams; empty, they "crawled" through. The mules floundered into the sand and the wagon lost headway as if strongly braked. A Moro, sprinting well ahead of the rest, paused and launched a spear. Macdonald bent forward swiftly to avoid it and the hair of the young woman, now hatless, brushed his cheek.

IN THAT electric moment both became aware of another and wholly surprizing factor. As the Moro poised a second spear a shot rang out dead ahead. The Moro had tumbled headlong even before the report of the rifle reached them. Followed a dramatic tableau.

A soldier, sole survivor of the four who had guarded the van, was deliberately walking back to practically sure death, pausing from time to time to kneel and fire. Left for dead by the Moros who had hurried back to participate in the main attack, he had stumbled to his feet and was on his way to Overton, under the impression that he alone survived the massacre, when he heard the clatter of mules and wagon behind.

As Macdonald swung the mules to clear the zone of fire, the soldier knelt and emptied the magazine of his rifle into the swarming Moros — emptied it slowly and with deadly deliberation. Instantly the Moros all but forgot the wagon in anger at the soldier. The soldier reloaded and fired again.

"Good boy," murmured Macdonald; "but you'll have to be quick or they'll get you before you can climb aboard." Then he realized, with a shock of vexed admiration, that the soldier did not intend to climb aboard. As the thought struck him, he yelled, "Swing her, you fool; nothing back there but dead men!"

The man shook his head and sprinkled blood in the dust of the road. The lower part of his face was a ghastly smear. A thrown spear had torn through jaw-bone and cheek.

"—— you!" roared Macdonald. "I'll make you."

And he left the wagon with a flying leap. As he passed the lines to her, the girl, with a cry, sought to restrain him. He shook her off savagely.

The Moros closed with the soldier as Macdonald sprinted back, and this time, apparently, he had conserved his fire too long. His first shot drilled a hole through the belly of a Moro in full stride and the Moro tumbled forward and sprawled out, not dead but convulsed with agony. Before he could fire again, however, the pack was upon him.

For the second time that day Miss Courtney covered her eyes. She heard the muffled sound of shots as the soldier fired from the ground, the muzzle of his rifle more than once actually boring into the body of an assailant. The Moros drew back momentarily as the metal-jacketed bullets tore into them. They drew even farther back, amazement magnified, as Macdonald charged them with his whip. Miss Courtney heard his shrill yell and looked.

She saw Macdonald stoop, gather up the quivering form of the soldier as he had picked her up only a few minutes before, and come racing back to the wagon, where she sat holding the reins he had thrust into her hands.

The Moros had recovered and were racing after. A few more yards and the wagon would be out of the sand. Life and death, or worse than death, hung on what the next thirty seconds would bring forth. The Moros were already well spent with running, while Macdonald, despite his load, ran like a deer. He had gained an initial start, so great had been the surprize of the Moros at his return and their momentary panic as that accursed whip cracked and bit.

He had almost doubled his lead when he reached the tail-gate of the wagon, tumbled his burden in like a sack of grain and vaulted after. He cracked the whip and roared to the mules as his feet touched the boards and they responded with a wild surge that dragged the wagon on to the firm road bed leading up to the crown of woods.

"You shouldn't have done that," the girl said in a weak voice and with a look Macdonald failed to see.

"I know I shouldn't," he retorted sarcastically and with a bitter sneer. "Put your skin in a little extra danger, eh? Well, I know a man when I see one, if I am a little lax in looking out for the ladies, and that boy is all man. I'm not sacrificing the like of him to humor any pampered petticoat."

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"And I know a man when I see one, too," the girl retorted softly. "And I know one who is very blind and unreasonable."

"Do you know anything about first aid?" Macdonald demanded. "All right, then; fix that boy up."

"How about you?" she replied almost angrily.

"Me?" Macdonald retorted, surprized. "There's nothing the matter with me."

"Nothing!" she exclaimed fiercely. "Look at your hand and your shirt!"

Macdonald glanced from hand to shirt. The back of the left hand, slashed in warding the spear, was blood to the finger tips and his clothes in front were stained and stiff to the knees.

"Scratches," he said impatiently; "they'd have been dry long ago if those Moros hadn't kept me all het up. But that boy is hurt bad. Fix him up."

"But——"

"But nothing!" Macdonald flared with a sudden ferocity that caused her to shrink from him. "You get busy on that boy—*pronto!* Or I'll throw you out o' the wagon!" And the face he thrust near hers was white with anger, save for the blazing eyes. "He ain't very pretty, is he?" sneered Macdonald. "Well, he was pretty enough to risk all that for you."

The tone was cold, cutting, as hard as the lines of the face. The girl looked at him for a moment with eyes that were full of a great hurt, then turned to the soldier, a ghastly bundle that would have tested the nerve of a graduate nurse.

As the girl worked, Macdonald sat in the wagon seat, moody, watching the road behind from time to time, keeping the mules at an easy canter. He felt sure that the Moros would intercept them by way of the Moro trail and lay an ambuscade. He was planning to meet this contingency and incidentally "keeping his mind off mischief," as he told himself grimly, and found it exceedingly difficult to keep it so, though that planning ahead might easily mean life or death, not only for him, but for the girl who constantly crowded in among his thoughts, filling him with chaotic emotion, over all and through all of which were the leaping flames of desire.

There was in this desire, however, little of that tenderness which spells the difference between lust and love, and what little there was Macdonald stubbornly fought down. He reflected darkly that, had the girl been less completely at his mercy, he could have found it in his heart to humble her pride to dust, for the poison of class hatred was stronger than ever, and the knowledge of futile desire, thrust upon him, as it were, through no fault of his own, merely aggravated the bitterness.

She, he told himself, had played with him, because he was a mule-skinner, negligible, a disdained leatherneck, and she, reckoning on the fact, had considered it perfectly safe. And now she had shown herself "yellow," on top of the frivolous and futile. Safe! If she could only know the black, reckless devils she had stirred into dancing, yelling, clamorous life! Desire, a-grin, riding despair. Opportunities wilfully thrown to the winds, and now this thing come to haunt him. Safe! He laughed, a grim travesty on mirth.

He justified himself. She had hesitated, shrunk back repulsed when he told her to do what she could for that ghastly bundle in the back. In a week or ten days, perhaps, she would be back in her soft luxuriant home telling a bunch of giggling tea-sippers how she had played with him, the young brute of a mule-skinner; how he had carried her through the massacre to safety because he was more wild animal than man, nd how he had finally made her play nurse to a common enlisted man, a horrid thing, literally hacked to pieces. And then in a year or two—married for money. His lip lifted in an ugly sneer. Oh, a fine woman! Good only for a man's plaything, a thought for nothing save pleasure, position, money. What mattered it if she clinched the contract with a wedding-ring? Only that she played safe, like all her kind.

AS THE sharp lightnings of his desire played through these black clouds of bitterness and cynicism, mules and wagon topped the ridge and Macdonald glanced back again before urging the mules to the supreme effort, one fraught with desperate danger. Two of the mules were already weaving and stumbling, one of them mortally wounded and near death, though Macdonald was not yet aware of this.

The wagon dropped over the rise, the range of vision was instantly restricted and Macdonald's glance, without intention, rested on the young woman, whose slim,

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nimble fingers were still busy with the wounded soldier. The girl's back was toward Macdonald, her head was bowed and the hair at the base of the neck caught his attention and held it. Through his mind flashed the furious thought that for him there was no part of this woman which did not tantalize and attract. The neck, like smooth, rich cream, and the glorious mist of that red-gold hair that seemed to grow upon the graceful neck as if every strand and little curl had been placed there by a master artist. Macdonald turned away, cursing savagely, uncertain whether it would give him greater pleasure to cover that neck with kisses or to break it with a blow.

In the midst of this brooding Macdonald became aware that the mules were running away. The off wheeler had stumbled for the last time and lurched forward, dead. This had set them going in grim earnest. For half a minute Macdonald endeavored to stop them with brake, voice and rein, then gave it up with that instantaneous formulation of decision that was characteristic of him and one of the outstanding elements of his strength.

"Have you finished with that guy?" he asked roughly, without looking back. "Well, crawl to the front here," he ordered in reply to her meek affirmative.

Answering her exclamation of horror at sight of the dragging mule, he stated the situation bluntly, with no pretense at breaking the news.

"Isn't it rather dangerous?" she asked after a moment.

"Rawther!" he said dryly. "That old yap of a colonel said careful driving would get you down safe. I'd like to see him on this seat now!" And he flung the lines from him with a short, ugly laugh.

They fluttered and trailed, bellying out now and again like gay streamers of death. She stared at them fascinated as he put an arm around her, swung about in the seat and dropped into the body of the wagon.

"Lie down," he said, and laid down beside her. "The Moro trail crosses the road just ahead," he continued. "They have probably laid an ambush."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the familiar sound of thrown spears came to them through the thunder of the mules and the rattle and clatter of the wagon gear.

"I thought so," said Macdonald with a grim smile; "and the worst is yet to come. Less than half a mile below here," he continued as the howls of the Moros followed the meteoric passage of the wagon, "is the first bad twist in the road—and the worst. The mules will follow the road. They aren't like horses. It would be better for us perhaps if they were, for they'll jerk this wagon around that curve and send it spinning like a top. Our only chance is to jump into the bushes. Be sure to hold your hands over your eyes, for we'll go into 'em as if shot out of a gun, and a thorn or a broken twig would be enough to wreck your beauty—" with a sneer—"even if the Moros don't get us at the next crossing beyond."

"But—but—" she faltered, "what will happen to this poor man?"

"By gad!" Macdonald exclaimed, "I hadn't thought of him," and stooping, seized the unconscious man and hurled him into the bushes that streaked past. "Best I could do," he stated gruffly as she cried out. "Chance here—none below; and here we are."

He gathered her in his arms for the jump and was instantly struck with the demoralizing thought that this social butterfly wore little more than nothing. The thought, and the close physical contact that had brought it into being, filled him with a leaping torment of rage and passion.

"Why should I work my fool head off to save you for somebody else?" he demanded hoarsely. "By ——, I won't! But first I am going to kiss you, my fine lady—a man's kiss." And he did, with a savage force that bruised her lips.

She had been taut before in anticipation of the impending leap. Now she lay in his arms, relaxed, inert, eyes closed, head back, lips ajar, a little thread of blood on lower lip and chin. He devoured her with his eyes, caught his breath.

"Together," he muttered, for he thought that she had fainted. "To hell together!"

And he laughed as if already contending on the white hot floors of torment for her possession. Through his wild laughter her answer came, almost a whisper.

"All right, if you prefer it that way," she said.

"What?" Macdonald cried, but there was no time for answer.

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The mules made the turn as he cried out, and even as they turned, so did his intentions. The wagon tipped as he gathered himself for the spring, and partly by its propulsion and partly by the propulsion of his own legs he was hurled high and far.

In mid-leap he yelled—

"Your eyes—cover them."

Instead she covered his.

They had scarcely come to rest, somewhat shaken and scratched, in a net of taut brush and vines before he demanded—

"Why did you do that?"

"You," she said simply, "were trying to save me. Why should I take everything and give nothing? A man's eyes are worth as much to him as a woman's to her."

He stared at her but said nothing. Her eyes were downcast. She had not looked at him since that savage kiss of the age-long moments ago. He helped her through the brush and to the road, no small undertaking, and then his eyes actually saw her for the first time since he had ordered her, against her will, as he thought, to tend the wounded soldier in the wagon; saw more than her face and neck, her hair and wonderful eyes. She was wearing a single skirt, little more than a mist-like drapery at best, and it was now all but shredded by brush and thorn. Macdonald's gaze met that of the girl; he looked hurriedly away.

"Thanks," she said in a wee small voice that had a little catch in it; "I—I am not—quite presentable."

"What—what——"

"I used my petticoat for bandages," she explained.

"Why did you do that?" he demanded.

"Why, you told me to."

"I didn't want you to strip yourself!" he exclaimed and again stared into her eyes. Her face was scarlet; to the roots of her hair aflame. It seemed to him that even the white curves of her throat showed signs of color. But she stared back bravely.

"After all," she said faintly, "it was little enough to give for a man's life."

Macdonald's eyes were filled with a great wonder, an ever increasing amazement. This young woman was presenting undreamed of qualities. He recalled with a dawning sense of shame and guilt that her conduct had really been superb in a situation where many women would have fainted out of hand or developed hysteria. Following close scrutiny, attended with some introspection, he demanded, curious—

"If that's the way you feel about it, why were you so reluctant to help him at first?"

"Oh, I was not!" she exclaimed. "I merely thought you needed attention and—and—" her voice dying out as her color mounted—"I wanted to help you—you more."

Macdonald stared for a moment, then struck himself in the mouth savagely, so that the blood flowed quickly and in profusion. She sprang toward him with a little involuntary cry of shocked alarm.

"Why did you do that?" she demanded. But at first he would not tell her. Finally he said—

"I bruised your lips."

And that was all the explanation she could get.

"You did?" was her first comment on this admission. "I didn't know." And she touched the lips in question with slender fingers. "Does it show?" she demanded.

"Well, I'll be— I'll be darned!" Macdonald exclaimed softly. Eyes and mouth were puckered in a quizzical half-smile. "Solomon was right. Here we are without arms, three miles from camp, death probably waiting for us around the next turn of the road—and you ask that. Was it prompted by vanity or the proprieties—fear of detection—or what? That's what I'd like to know."

THE girl had been sitting on her heels, graceful as a wood nymph, hugging her knees in a rather pathetic effort to minimize the lack of conventional attire. She sprang up now, utterly orgetful of self.

"I am not half so bad as you," she charged with a little laugh that bubbled up despite the horrors of the last few hours and the dangers ahead. "If you linger, knowing the danger, why shouldn't I? As a matter of fact, I'm not afraid—with you—not much, even when the Moros are right around. But, Mr. Mule-Skinner," she finished impulsively, "won't you tell me who and what you are? You aren't an ordinary mule-skinner. I know that."

"Would it make much difference to you if I were?" Macdonald demanded quietly.

"No-oo-o, I don't believe it would," she replied slowly, pondering the question. And then, as her face lighted up with sudden understanding, "It's just that I can't

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think of you as an ordinary mule-skinner. You could never be that—whether or not you are the fairy prince in disguise. Why, the very name they have given you sets you apart as something—something——"

"Dangerous," Macdonald cut in grimly.

"Well, dangerous," she agreed; "but what man is worth his salt who isn't potentially dangerous?"

"I am no fairy prince, in any event," Macdonald told her drily. "I am merely—I'll tell you what I am when you have promised to marry me. We'd better be getting out of this."

"Suppose I promise now," she retorted, the lights of laughter, daring, tenderness all dancing in her eyes.

He took a quick step forward, while she stood fast, suddenly quiet, sober, a strange look in her eyes. As swiftly as he had moved, he stopped, his own eyes stern, his face white and set.

"I haven't asked you," he stated grimly. At her quick look of hurt surprize he added hastily, however, "Why, gosh-hang it, woman, I can't ask you here—now—in this situation—and the way I'm fixed. We are in a sea of trouble, and the Moros aren't the worst of it. I fear them a darn sight less than I do you—and me. We may have to spend tonight in the woods, and I warn you, you have got to help me, not plague me with voice, word and—and by gad, woman, I don't want your answer while your mind is all inflamed with gratitude. When I ask you, I'll be wanting you to make your decision on a firmer foundation than these last few hours."

"You are an exceedingly careful mule-skinner," she half teased with a little smile.

"And you," growled Macdonald, "are a glorious little fool."

"I am a very fickle young woman," she assured him. "I warn you, you had better take me while you have the chance. I am quite proud, too, when I am in my right mind—and conventional environment."

"See here!" Macdonald growled savagely and, striding forward, seized her by the shoulder. "Get me right. I don't give a —— for bell, book or ring. If I'm careful, it's because I choose to be; not that I care for consequences. But Kipling was right; and, anyway, I promised Sherry, poor devil, that I'd see you through safe. When I'm ready I'll take you, if I have to crack the Ten Commandments, and I'll be ready some day. Don't you marry until I am," he continued with a grim smile, "if you have any regard for the other fellow. I'm not ready now. You'd look fine as a mule-skinner's wife, now wouldn't you? And we can't stay up in these woods forever."

"I like the woods," she murmured.

"You'd die in a week," he snorted. "Furthermore, I'm goin' to show Sherry by seeing you through this safe. He's all man, if he did bawl me out. He's got two legs and he stands on 'em, not on red tape, rank and authority. If we had more like him these Moros wouldn't be cutting up today. He taught 'em something."

"So you would keep a promise but break the Ten Commandments," she persisted, a wee glimmer of humor in her eyes.

Macdonald gripped her shoulder so tightly that she cried out.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I didn't mean to hurt you; but you deserve to be hurt. I ought to lay you across my knee. As to the promise, I wouldn't hesitate to break it if I knew this was the only chance I was going to get, but I am not going to break it for the whim of anything in skirts——"

At the last word he checked himself, then hurried on.

"I had forgotten," he said. "I'll crawl back in the brush a bit and throw you my trousers. You put them on and we'll light out o' here."

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" she exclaimed, suddenly furious, indignant.

He looked at her, bewildered.

"Well, I'll be ——! By gad! You are ready to take to the hills and won't wear my clothes."

"But the idea!" she protested. "It's ridiculous."

"You don't want to go into camp like that, do you?"

"No-o-o," she admitted. "But how about yourself?"

"Me? ——!" he exclaimed. "It won't be the first time I have worn running-pants in public. Don't you worry about me. When you know me better you'll find out I generally look out for number one."

"Oh, yes," she retorted, sarcastic; "like going back for that soldier, for instance; not to mention the way you exposed me to spears and—ugh—those horrible knives."

"You," he called over his shoulder as he crawled belly-down into the brush, "were a woman. I'd have done that for an old

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woman, or an ugly one, just the same, though perhaps not quite so earnestly. As for the soldier, he was walking straight into hell for me—and you, and I aim never to take more from any man than I can repay. Furthermore, I admired his nerve; and, anyway, I wasn't taking much of a chance. I had it all figured out."

"Oh, yes," she sniffed, "I know you figure in a hurry, else we wouldn't be here now, but I can't forget that you never seem to include your own life and limb in the sum total."

"That's where you are wrong," he told her through the mask of shrubbery. "I wouldn't have fought half as hard if I had been behind the lines somewhere directing the fight."

"That sounds Irish."

"My mother was Irish," he retorted. "God bless her! She died when I was twelve."

As they walked down the road together, as strange a pair perhaps as had ever trod that island of strange peoples and strange happenings, he told her of his plan, and what might have seemed the madness of its leisurely pursuance.

"The Moros," he said, "are waiting down there at the next crossing of the Moro trail, wondering what has happened to us." And then, with a sudden change of tone and manner, "By gad!" he exclaimed. "They won't wait, girl. You have robbed me of my wits. The mules will have passed five minutes ago and they'll be sending scouts up the road and the trail, looking for us. I had intended—by gad!" he exclaimed a second time, and with good reason, for as they rounded the last turn of the hairpin curve they came upon the wagon, wheels up, mules still attached.

The wagon had caught in the vines and underbrush and, the harness holding, had anchored the mules effectually, checking their headlong flight, though the wagon was wrecked. Macdonald hurried to them, soothed them with voice and hand and began undoing the chain traces.

"Why not leave them here if there is so much need for hurry," ventured the girl.

"The need has passed, for the moment," Macdonald assured her, "and I have changed my plans. These mules may be our salvation. I had intended going down the road a ways and crawling through the brush to the shelter of an overhanging ledge I know. But," he added with a small smile that was both insinuation and compliment, "I'd rather charge those Moros with these mules as a flying vanguard than risk a night up here in the woods with you.

"You might catch your death of cold," he added, and his face was sober, but the smile, now both humorous and quizzical, played in his eyes.

Her own eyes dropped and she flushed a little, biting a lip that quivered between laughter and tears.

"We'll run between these two," Macdonald explained. "I'll drive four, and old Sam will follow. In that way we have two mules in front, one on either side and one behind. We ought to get through all right; particularly in view of the fact that the Moros will be suspicious of this arrangement; aren't here in force, anyway. I beat 'em to it, as I intended—all but a few."

IT WAS in the formation described that they approached the second intersection of the Moro trail. Miss Courtney, following instructions, was hanging to a trace about where the stirrup would have been on a saddle horse. Macdonald was walking beside her, four lines wrapped about his left hand, in his right the great whip that snatched quarters from thick grass or eyeballs from sockets with equal deftness and despatch.

"I'll not make you run until I have to," he told her, "but you'll have to run like the devil when you do run. Good thing you haven't got those skirts on, after all. The faster we go the less likely we are to stop a spear."

A moment later he had cracked the whip and the mules were swinging into a trot. They had gone only a short distance when three Moros stepped into the road, and were followed by two more, and still more. The Moros apparently were under the impression that the mules had broken loose, leaving the wagon and its human freight behind, and were intent on stopping them. As other Moros were still coming out of the brush, however, those already in the road became aware of their mistake, but instead of standing their ground and turning the mules back, as they might possibly have done, despite Macdaonald's handling, they scuttered back into the bush. In the moment of discovery Macdonald brought the whip into play and sent the mules tearing down the road, propelled by voice and lash.

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"I can't keep up," gasped the girl as the mules gathered headway.

"Take my arm," Macdonald ordered, "and hold on to that strap like grim death. You've got to keep up. I can't pick you up at this pace—and handle the mules; and if they ever get away from us—good night!"

III

THE mules swept toward the ambuscade, ran into a shower of spears and swept past, just as Macdonald had figured; but there was one thing he had overlooked. They were no longer to be controlled by human hands or voice. They had passed through too much that day and were still aquiver from the runaway of a few minutes before. This fresh attack frightened them into another wild panic.

Macdonald held them as best he could, but they were gaining speed with every jump; all save the mule at his right, which, plunging and stumbling from a mortal wound, slowly dropped behind. As if to balance matters, the mule referred to by Macdonald as "Old Sam" had quit the rear and was rapidly overhauling the leaders. He passed them as Macdonald glanced at the girl. Her mouth was open, her face contorted, her breast rising and falling in short, sharp, painful efforts to fill tortured lungs.

As he looked, the hot tears of pity and compassion crowded up into those little chambers of emotion that lie behind the eyes of every human being, no matter how dry the eyes. And the woman's splendid pluck touched Macdonald almost as deeply as her suffering. He could dimly understand the strain she must be under—and was to come to even greater understanding—for even he, who excelled most amateurs in nearly every field of athletic endeavor and might have stood out as a professional in some, was covering ground in great strides that would have taxed the strength and ability of most men. He noted with a quick throb of mixed emotion that her slender, competent legs were behaving perfectly, and through his mind leaped a picture of the mythological lady who lost her race for love of golden apples. Given lung-power on a par with those slim, shapely limbs and this girl would be hard to catch. With the reflection, Macdonald threw every ounce of strength into a final effort to check the mules, and was almost jerked to his face.

Instantly he let go the reins, placed an arm about the girl and, running thus, they came to a stop, the Moros clamoring several hundred yards behind. Their clamor increased as the situation became plain to them. Macdonald paused only long enough to swing the exhausted girl to his shoulder, as he had done an hour or so before, and started down the road at a swift trot.

"When they," he instructed her, "are within a hundred yards, say, let me know and I'll sprint a bit. We'll win through yet."

He had overestimated his strength, however. No man can carry a handicap of one hundred and thirty-odd pounds and win over lithe, barefooted savages. He realized it when her voice came to him in an alarmingly short time advising him that the Moros were already within one hundred yards. He realized it far more keenly half a minute later. It was now his turn to feel the agony of bursting lungs; yet he set his teeth and ran as he had never run before. They were approaching the lower end of the Moro trail, where it joins the road about a mile from camp. He would do it—or die trying, he assured himself, as he gasped for the air he could not get. It began to look as if he would die. He was all but running blind. She noticed his distress.

"I am rested now," she said; "let me down. I can run."

He was ashamed of the gasp of relief with which he allowed her to slip through his arms, turning as she slipped, so that she faced in the direction they were going. It was as neatly done as a figure in a dance. She was running with him as her feet touched the ground. And for a hundred yards she almost outran him, although he was running swiftly on sheer nerve.

A glance back showed that they were actually holding their own. Then her breath failed her again and, though she tried gamely, he noted that her legs had turned to water and that her feet were stumbling. He linked his arm in hers and thus they ran for a little way. They were now within a dozen yards of the Moro trail. He realized that the attempt to beat the Moros in the race for camp was doomed to failure. There was only one other thing to do. Reaching into a pocket of the trousers—now worn by her—he took out a large clasp-knife with a long, slim, dagger-pointed blade, known in the West as a stockman's knife.

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"I am going to give you this knife," he said as they sped along. Freed of her weight, he was regaining his own breath as hers failed. "If the worst comes to the worst—use it. Open your corset now, so that there will be no chance for failure. When the time comes, if it does, God forbid, place the point just below the breast-bone and drive it in with a quick, strong thrust. It will be over in a moment; just one sharp pang, I fancy. But for God's sake don't fail! And for God's sake don't do it until they are almost on you. The mules will bring out a rescue party. There's a chance for you, yet."

"For me?" she gasped.

"Yes," Macdonald assured her, "I am going to stop when they get too close for comfort and try to hold 'em—for a minute, anyway. Run as fast as you possibly can. I can't promise to keep 'em long. This whip was fairly effective on the wagon, with fear of the mules to help; it won't amount to much here. I can rest you before we part company, however."

And he swung her up and ran with her cradled in his arms.

"I won't leave you!" she exclaimed, the vigor of protest dying out in a gasp.

"Yes, you will," he assured her, as if it was an unarguable fact. And then, "Do you know, I am sorry we didn't stay in the woods. Now some other fellow will get you. But it's better so, perhaps."

And he tried to smile with lips that again gasped for air. She burst into tears at sight of that pitiful attempt, and at the look in his eyes.

"I wish so, too," she said in a voice grown fairly strong again; "but I'm not going to leave you, and I'll never, never marry any one else. And I want you to kill me—if we have to. I might not have the nerve. I want you anyway. Now I'm going to kiss you," she said and, struggling up in his arms, she pressed her lips against his taut, tortured ones.

"Put me down," she ordered; "you are dying of exhaustion."

"Only thing to do," he gasped; "but for God's sake, run!"

He hugged her close for a moment and touched her hair with lips and face.

"I could almost wish you were going with me," he gasped; "if I were sure we were going the same way. I hadn't thought much of heaven until I placed you there." So saying, he placed her on her feet and thrust her from him, gently, with the gentle command—

"Run!"

THEY were exactly opposite the point where the Moro trail leaves the road on its shorter cut up the ladder of the mountain. As he thrust her toward camp a spear struck the road less than three feet to the right and just in front. Macdonald turned and, as he did so, a second spear struck him on the head.

It was merely a glancing blow but the impact of the thing was great and it cut to the bone. The girl sprang toward him with a sharp cry and caught him as he slipped to his knees. She had dropped the knife in her haste and excitement.

"The knife—quick—run!" he implored and staggered to his feet wiping a small river of blood from his eyes.

But she did not run. She recovered the knife, however, as the Moros closed in. They rushed, bent on dispatching Macdonald with the *kris*, having discarded spears forthwith, or in wild throws, as they saw him fall. They were unprepared for the swift punishing play of the whip, but this time it did not deter them. A Moro was swinging at Macdonald's head with a great *barong* as the girl sat down in the road and put the point of the knife to her breast. The knife pricked the white flesh but the girl stayed the thrust until she should see that Macdonald was dead.

Macdonald stooped swiftly as the Moro swung, still running, caught him about the legs and hurled him over his head. Through some queer psychological twist, the Moro asprawl in the air, the look of astonishment on his face, the hands out to break the fall—one or all these things struck the girl as exceedingly funny. She laughed aloud as he struck on all fours, lurching forward on face and head. But the sight of Macdonald, overthrown by the impact, tumbling after the Moro, checked the laughter with hysterical abruptness.

The reaction in the next instant was equally violent. Macdonald regained his feet as she laid both hands on the handle of the clasp-knife. In his hands he held the ponderous two-handed sword the Moro had dropped in his headlong fall. His hand had touched and closed upon it as he rolled to

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his feet with that cat-like control of equilibrium that had marked his brief combat with Kerrigan earlier in the day.

The girl's heart, painfully aflutter and leaping wildly, had stopped the breath in her throat as Macdonald tumbled end over end. That fall, however, had undoubtedly saved his life—for the moment at least. Aside from the blow avoided, half a dozen Moros were reaching out at the moment to cleave flesh and bone with their wicked knives. The wild tumble confused them as they packed in, each eager to be first at the kill.

Confusion was only for a moment, however. Even as Macdonald tumbled to his feet, a Moro, quicker than his fellows in following up, had covered the ground between and was striking at Macdonald as the latter, roaring challenge and welcome, struck with the great flashing blade of the *barong*. For the second time that day the girl saw a man's head spring from his shoulders, as if just alive instead of already dead. There was this difference, however, that in this case part of the trunk and an arm jumped with it.

This frightful proof of strength to wield the unwieldy *barong*, generally used as a one-stroke weapon by the weaker Moros, had no deterrent effect on them. On the contrary it seemed to the girl that they closed with a deadlier intent and a more terrifying eagerness. They knew, as wolves know, just how ineffective is strength against numbers, even if supplemented with swift sureness of hand and eye, when the weapons are fangs or edged steel.

Macdonald, too, no less than they, realized that it was only a question of time when one or another of those eager swordsmen would slip past the flashing blade of the *barong* and deliver a disabling or a deadly wound. Those armed with *barongs* would have little chance, save from behind, but with the skillful wielders of the lighter *kris* it would be another and entirely different matter.

This reflection, however, created no emotion, if a flaring ferocity be discounted, for Macdonald, when the mules failed him, had reconciled himself to death. He had but two thoughts now: to reap largely as he went and to save the girl. He was between her and the Moros, his back to her, but even in this precarious situation he could not forego a glance. Her eyes were on him, fascinated, the knife in a rigid little hand. He called to her above the clamor of the Moros and the incidental noises of the fight.

"Beat it!" he yelled. "Run! Run!" And then, as a happy thought struck him, "I can hold them long enough to give you your chance. You may be in time to spread the alarm—send help."

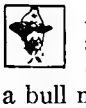
"Do you mean that; is there a chance?" she cried.

"Sure!" he lied joyfully. "Run now—for all you're worth!"

She was on her feet and racing down the road almost in the moment Macdonald finished. And, as she ran, the inevitable happened. A Moro slipped past the ponderous blade and struck at Macdonald from a wide full swing. The long, wedge-pointed blade of the *barong* was practically useless at such close quarters, but Macdonald managed partially to ward the blow and, with an uninterrupted continuance of the warding movement, drove the brass-heeled, foot-long hilt of the *barong* butt first into the Moro's face, almost blotting it out.

As the stricken man crumpled, a dozen Moros, moved by a single impulse, jammed around Macdonald, slashing and stabbing in a frenzy of eagerness and wrath. Macdonald fought like a leopard trapped and the very eagerness of the Moros gave him an advantage, for more than one was actually wounded by an overeager fellow and the blows were robbed of strength in that squirming, blood-hungry crush. But Macdonald knew that his time had come. No man could stand that hacking, although the wounds were as yet only scorers of flesh. At any moment a limb might be severed, his head cleft or a large artery opened.

"Could she make it?"



AS THE thought rang in his head, spurring him to greater effort, there came to him a great bellow such as a bull might make in going into battle and an amazing figure charged out of the cavernous mouth of the Moro trail. It was Kerrigan, a flutter of rags, naked to the waist, encrusted in blood and dirt. Macdonald would not have recognized him except for his great stature and voice. Even so he was half convinced sun, wounds and strain had turned his head.

There was no such doubt in the mind of

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the Moro. Armed with the crowbar, Kerrigan fell upon them as a scourge, a whirlwind of destruction. Three were dead, their skulls crushed, as the bellow filled roadway and forest. The others were scattering in terror as the iron club threshed among them, uncertain what was this grotesque, death-dealing thing, or what might follow him out of the forest.

Macdonald, despite failing strength that ebbed rapidly through open wounds, was not slow to take advantage of this miraculous-seeming intervention and to press it. The blade of the *barong* described scythe-like arcs as he seized on momentary confusion among the Moros, and they, taken front and flank by a man who should have died a hundred deaths and an apparition that might well be man or devil, broke and fled.

"Harry, you old he-hound!" Macdonald yelled. "I'll fight you if you insist, but right this minute I'd a —— sight rather kiss that ugly mug o' yours. Come! We better get out o' this. They'll be coming back, most likely, when they stumble on the spears they dropped—and realize what they ran from."

"You were in a —— of a hurry to get out o' there!" roared Kerrigan. "Ducked me nut in time, thanks t' you, and tried t' join you. Goin' too fast; Moros too —— thick. Took to the grass, Moros after me. They didn't have a chance, though; too strong in the legs for 'em. Been runnin' mighty near ever since; a thousand years. And here I am."

"Glad t' see you," Macdonald murmured, grinning.

Having said which, he staggered three steps and, cursing bitterly in a scarcely coherent mumble, lurched across the body of a Moro whose head and features were an ugly mess of splintered bone and pulped flesh.

AND SO it happened that late in the afternoon of that rather eventful day a slim flower of a girl, wearing the trousers of a mule-skinner notorious for wild escapades, her bosom partly bare and colored with a tiny trickle of blood, sped past mules that had stopped or fallen by the wayside, and into camp, where she collapsed at the feet of a sentry, gasping first news of the massacre and babbling incoherently of a wonderful creature who had performed miracles and needed help.

The sentry discharged his piece. Men of the guard came running. In no time the camp was a bee-hive filled with the wild screams of the bugle and a hubbub of shouted orders.

A party on foot, hurrying out in advance of the main party that was to follow on horseback, came ten minutes later on a sight scarcely less strange than that of the girl speeding into camp with word of battle and massacre. Two figures wove down the road, arm in arm, suggesting drunken men in more than one respect. One, a great, hairy creature, carried a crowbar in his left hand. His right hand dragged something along the road. The man was all but naked, so ragged was the clothing he wore.

The second man, shorter by a head than his giant companion, wore a union suit. On his left shoulder he carried a *barong*, the four-foot blade of which was dull with stains. As the hurrying party drew near they noted that the men wore many bandages of gaudy Moro raiment. That each had played first-aid surgeon to the other was gaudily obvious. The leader of the party also noted with a start the thing that Kerrigan dragged. It was a Moro. One arm dangled horribly, broken between wrist and elbow. The shoulder to which the arm hung was swollen and bruised, also seemingly broken. Kerrigan was dragging the Moro by the hair of his head, legs and body trailing in the dust.

"A souvenir," cackled Kerrigan and swung the Moro up at arm's length by the hair, so that his feet swung an inch from the ground.

More than one soldier felt his dinner turn over and kick up at that ghastly sight.

"Cut it out!" the sergeant said sharply; "put him down."

"Sure," said Kerrigan, grinning horribly with split lips, and promptly dropped the limp Moro with a readiness entirely too effective. "Put him down!" he grunted with sudden ferocity. "Sure! He's down, ain't he? Putting 'em down is what we been doing all day—me an' Dynamite. An' I wanna say I brought this fellow 'long's hostage. Throwin' spears. Ran back. Ketch this guy. Throw any more, mash his head in, says I. 'At's *datto*, —— him!"

Whereupon, Kerrigan ran on into incoherent babblings.

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Stretchers had been secured and the two men were being carried up the steep slope to the hospital, less than four hundred yards from the shore-line and several hundred feet above it, when Kerrigan muttered clearly in a stronger voice:

"By ——! A plumb fool. Shouldda married the gal."

Following guard-mount next day Colonel O'Toole strode into the ward, attended by his orderly. Both Macdonald and Kerrigan had rallied overnight, though Macdonald was utterly without strength through loss of blood. As yet the surgeon did not realize that a fever was breeding in wounds which festered and that this complication would drag Macdonald deep into the Valley of the Shadow before he finally fought back to health. Even had this been realized, however, the colonel might still have been admitted, for a colonel is granted privileges not accorded lesser men. The surgeon merely cautioned him indirectly.

"I don't believe there are two other men in the Philippines who could have rallied as these have," he said. "However, the danger is past now unless complications set in. Don't excite them—though I doubt if they are of the excitable kind."

"I won't," growled the colonel, whose small stature and great voice formed a striking enough combination in itself.

Added to this, however, he had a fiery old face and eyes, and his general carriage and manner of prancing along on his toes was strongly suggestive of a game-bantam cock.

"You boys," boomed the colonel, "distinguished yourselves yesterday. I'm proud of you."

"Sure we did," Kerrigan jubilated. "Takes the mule-skinners t' do it right." With a swift change of mood, "I'm a plumb fool. Now if I——"

"How's Miss Courtney?" Macdonald interrupted in a weak, flat voice.

There was something in the eyes of Macdonald, however, that caused Colonel O'Toole to look at him sharply. What he read in those eyes was accentuated by the white bandages that framed them.

"Suffering from shock and exhaustion," replied the colonel. "Otherwise first rate—thanks to you." There was more emotion in the last three words than Colonel O'Toole cared to show or admit. "In bed today," he continued gruffly. "Doctor's orders. Had a devil of a time keeping her there. Wanted to come right up and thank you; both of you. Told her I was competent to do it; that I could promise you something you'd appreciate a devil of a lot more than thanks—good jobs and the Congressional medal. I've recommended you both for the latter."

"Never mind the charity and that hero stuff," Macdonald said in the same weak voice, a sneer in his eyes, though his lips were hidden. "What I want to know is this—do I come to see her when I'm out of this blankety blank hole?"

"You mean, will you be welcome to visit her at my home—to see her on terms of social equality?"

"That's what I mean—exactly."

Colonel O'Toole look d at the young man long and gravely. Finally he said:

"No you won't. In time perhaps——"

"To —— with time," Macdonald interrupted as roughly as weakness would permit. "To —— with your charity and your medals. I can stand on my own legs. And I tell you now that I am going to see her, and what's more, I am going to marry her. The only way you can prevent it is to knock me on the head now or fix it up with these blankety blank medicos so I'll cash in natural-like. Go to it if you've got the guts. I'm telling you; that's your only chance."

The old colonel smiled slightly and considered Macdonald with speculative eyes.

"Macdonald," he said at last, "we might as well understand each other, you and I. You saved my niece's life; we owe you much. But there are ways in which she shouldn't pay, and which you won't ask, if you are a decent man."

"Aw, can that stuff," Macdonald murmured.

COLONEL O'TOOLE drew a chair to the bedside and sat down, speaking in a low voice close to Macdonald's which ear so that Kerrigan might not overhear; was needless, as Kerrigan's ear on that side was swathed in a thick cushion of cotton and gauze.

"I say decent man because it means so much more than gentleman," Colonel O'Toole continued. "As to payment, I'll put it this way: if you, by saving her life, have won the right you claim, so has Kerrigan. He saved yours. How would you

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like to have Kerrigan and the rest of the boys over there in my house every evening courting the girl you pretend to care for? Wouldn't like it, would you?

"Well, as a matter of fact, Kerrigan can advance more reasons for recognition than you can. He is without education and utterly devoid of any of those refinements of mind and spirit we sometimes identify collectively as polish, but Kerrigan is saving his money and is looking up, yearning for better things, even though his yearning comes too late—the trouble with most of us old bachelors. But you—you have been headed straight for the devil ever since I knew you.

"Didn't know I knew you, eh? There are a lot of things you boys in the ranks don't know, no matter how intelligent you are, or how well educated. You were a good shot, a hard-riding, hard-fighting son-of-a-gun, as the boys say—a man who excelled in many things. I watched you closely. I had hoped you would go in for a commission. I could have helped you then. Instead, I had to save you on more than one occasion, from a bobtail once—the time you nearly killed Sergeant Murphy for calling you a liar—and in the end, after three years, though the best soldier in your troop, you hadn't learned enough discipline to warrant your troop commander in making you a lance-jack. Then, instead of going into something worth while and more suited than the Army to that arrogant, headstrong, devilish temper of yours, you elected to dry rot in the Philippines as a mule-skinner. High ambition, eh? Do you wonder I don't look with any great amount of satisfaction on this present ambition of yours?"

"Go away," said Macdonald, closing his eyes; "I'm cured."

"No, I am not going away." Colonel O'Toole set his face in an expression of more than ordinary ferocity, but his fiery old eyes blinked twice and it was in a rather husky voice that he continued. "I didn't intend to go into all this until you were on your feet again. I don't know but what it is best to do it right now, however. I want you to promise me not to see Shirley—Miss Courtney for at least a year. In a year you can demonstrate to all concerned, yourself included, whether you have the courage and the inclination to make a man of yourself; whether you are moved by something more than a passing infatuation; whether you are merely going to make one good fight and quit.

"You are a strong man, Macdonald, and a fearless one. But it isn't your courage I admire. Any red-blooded American would have tried to do what you did, but with this difference: there isn't one in a hundred thousand who would have tried as hard, as persistently, or with the same clear-headed, quick-thinking efficiency in the presence of death—a most unpleasant form of death. You have that high quality of courage that fights to the last ditch—and then jumps the ditch. That quality interests me, but the thing I admire is the splendid coordination of mind, body and spirit.

"At present your attitude toward life is that of a man who stands on the side-lines at a football game, criticizing the play. You may be a better man than any in the game, but you haven't made any effort to get into it, and you'll never take the ball across the goal-line until you do.

"Get into the game, boy! Put that dour Scotch stubbornness to work. Stop telling yourself that you are as good as any —— man in the world—and prove it. Got you there, eh? Oh, I had you sized up long ago. Got a raw deal once, or thought you did, and have been sulking ever since. I thought at first you'd forget it, but the —— Scotch wouldn't let you. After all, you are still pretty much of a cub.

"Why I, a detested Army officer, a regimental commander, a blankety blank martinet and tyrant, am a better democrat than you. I've worked for everything I've got, but you—you want to be taken at your own valuation, and that in the face of evidence to the contrary deliberately manufactured by you; or rather, you tell yourself that you don't give a —— what they think; that they can take a running jump into —— with their opinions. Why, I'll bet when you were in the thickest of it up above you weren't thinking as much about the splendid thing you were doing as you were that it would show those blankety blank Army officers where they got off when it came to fighting.

"Now, my boy, I'm going to be frank with you. I'd hate to see Shirley marry any man—knowing men as I do; but, Macdonald, next to having you for a son, I'd rather have you for a nephew-in-law, if—and that's the big question—you can show me

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that you are finally awake to something besides yourself. You've got to swallow that —— Scotch pride, though, and get down to business. Play the game! Are you going to give me that promise?"

"——, yes!" Macdonald assured him. "If you insist; but it isn't going to make the slightest bit of difference."

"Why not?" roared Colonel O'Toole.

"Because," Macdonald replied, "I made up my mind coming down that I couldn't ask her to marry me until I had something better to offer than a *nipa* shack and a canvas cot."

Colonel O'Toole reached over and patted a sheath of bandages with a tenderness almost womanly.

"Just for that, son, I'm going to tell you something I hadn't intended to tell you, and wouldn't tell you, anyway, if she hadn't beat me to it like a little fool. Why, confound it, man, you've got her hypnotized with that exhibition of yesterday. I'm —— if I don't believe she'd almost take to the woods with you.

"You took an unfair advantage. No, don't bristle up. It was unintentional, I'll admit, but devilish effective. There you were up there in cave-man surroundings, fitting into the picture as naturally as Adam fitted into Eden. By gad, I scarcely blame the girl! But you've got to show something more than that, young man, if you would build your happiness and hers on an enduring foundation. If you weren't willing to do that, by gad, I'd throw you out if you were my own son!"

"Spoken like my father," Macdonald said and grinned a little. "And I want to say, colonel, that both he and you are men. I've been an ass."

"Never mind that," Colonel O'Toole put in hastily and made for the door. "I intend to drop in right often," he called from the doorway a few minutes later, "and maybe I'll bring a certain person up to say goodby before she sails for the States."

COULD he have looked ahead a day, or even an hour, he would have seen the beginning of a period of suspense and dread in which Macdonald was to fight the Angel of Death as he had never fought the Moros. The fever was beginning to work as Colonel O'Toole paused at the door. It was a half-hour later, however, that Macdonald turned toward Kerrigan with a strength he had not possessed ten minutes before.

"Handsome," he demanded, "will you lend me one hundred dollars when I get out of this hole?"

"I will like—" Kerrigan began, then paused, struck by the expression in the eyes of the mule-skinner Dynamite. "Wha'd'yu want it for?" demanded Kerrigan, a man who was supposed to be hoarding his money, and regarded as very close.

"I am going home," Macdonald said. "Home, by ——! I'm going back and make good."

"Then stop that cussin'," Kerrigan urged. "It ain't right t' cuss when you are so nigh death."

"Are you goin' to lend me that money?" demanded Macdonald.

"Are you goin' t' marry the gal?" Kerrigan countered, crafty, cautious.

"—— you, yes!"

"Well," Kerrigan temporized, "I don't know—" Then suddenly, "Sure, I'll let you have it, Dynamite. I'd be a plumb fool not to, I reckon, havin' thrown away my chance."

A moment later Kerrigan crossed himself. The mule-skinner Dynamite was again fighting the Moros, cursing with every blow.

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The CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

SOMETHING from our old comrade E. E. Harriman concerning Doc Middleton:

For the information and amusement of those who have been hunting up data concerning Doc Middleton I submit the following, gathered at Requa, at the mouth of the Klamath River on the evening of July five. This was told me by the brother-in-law of Jack Welch.

WHEN the head of Doc Middleton was worth one thousand dollars, hot or cold, to the man that brought it in, Jack Welch and Buck Taylor decided to win spending money by finding Doc and persuading him to lie down and be a good dog. They started out quietly, thinking that their object was unknown to any but themselves. They scouted a bit, then made camp one night and cooked their bacon.

They left their guns leaning against a tree and sat down to eat about six feet away. They had barely begun to dish up the bacon when a voice said, "Just move over about ten feet to the left."

They looked and saw a rifle looking at them from a bush and it had a terrible hole in the muzzle. They hesitated a second and the voice grew a little impatient.

"I wouldn't be slow about it either," it said and they moved. Then Doc Middleton came out of the brush, sat down by the fire, ate their nice hot bacon and frying-pan bread, laughed at them and told them to be careful not to hunt Doc again for "the kiotes might get you if you did."

He took all the shells they had and their guns, then told them the guns would be left about a mile away and departed. The boys made up their minds that there were many occupations more congenial for them than hunting Doc Middleton and they never made another attempt.—E. E. HARRIMAN.

IN CONNECTION with his story beginning in this issue Hugh Pendexter gives us some interesting historical data:

Norway, Maine.

I have liberally consulted Alexander Henry's "Journal," edited by the late Dr. Elliott Coues, published by Francis Harper, 1897, for the color and atmosphere of this story. The notes supplied by this celebrated authority on early Western travel more than doubles the value of the "Journal."

HENRY was employed by the North West Company. He built a post at the confluence of the Park and the Red Rivers in 1800-01 and in the following year built the post at the mouth of the Pembina. He was at Pembina largely until 1808. The lower Red River department, of which he was in charge, extended throughout what is now North Dakota and Minnesota as well as north of the international boundary. He was at Pembina in 1804, whereas in my story I have him away and one, *Chabot* (fictitious character) in his place. He visited the Mandans and Minnetarees on the Missouri and the Knife Rivers in 1806, and it is from his journal of that trip, also from Lewis and Clark's Expedition, Chittenden's Am. Fur Trade, H. M. Brackenridge's journal of his Missouri trip in 1811, that I drew my pictures of the Mandans and their neighbors.

GEORGE CATLIN sketched and wrote about these Indians, but, as he was hopelessly pro-Indian and idealized them to the maximum degree, he proves untrustworthy, although his sketches, especially of the river and the village life, have their value. I have utilized the coming of Lewis and Clark in the latter part of the story as an agency operating upon the mind of Le Borgne, the one-eyed war chief of the Minnetarees. L. and C. were at the mouth of the Platte on July 26, 1804, and the news of their coming spread far and wide, and their meager force was increased by rumor into more than a hundred and fifty armed men. The expedition arrived at the Mandan villages in the later part of October.

THE North West Company was the strongest rival of the Hudson Bay Company. It grew out of the old French trade round the upper lakes, and at the end of the French and Indian War was under the control of some energetic Scotch traders of Montreal. These traders acted each for himself until 1783, when they formed the N. W. Co. This combine was made necessary by the shrinkage in profits due to the small-pox epidemic in 1782. The Pond, Pangman & Co., of Montreal, including (Sir) Alexander McKenzie was a rival to the N. W. Pond joined the N.W. Company. In 1787 the N.W. had absorbed this rival. After nearly a decade of great activities and much prosperity, the partners split. Simon McTavish represented one faction, Alexander McKenzie the other. The latter party organized the New N. W. Company, and was invariably known as the X. Y. Company. The only explanation of this name I have been able to find is that the new company took the next two letters following "W" in "N. W." If I remember correctly Chittenden suggests this. (See his "History of the Fur Trade" for details of history of various fur companies.)

Henry speaks of his employers as The "Gentlemen

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of the North," and all traders were proud to be known as "Northmen." Henry, by the way, was in at the finish of Astor's Pacific Fur Company, when the N. W. ousted it from the Columbia.

Old Tabashaw was killed by a Sioux war party at Wild Rice River in early Winter of 1807. I have described this character much at Henry pictures him. Concerning the dead buffalos seen floating in the Red River each Spring, and in every western river where the buffalo roamed and ice formed, John McDonnell in his "Journal" says that in May, 1795, he counted 7,360 dead buffalo mired along the banks of the Qu' Appelle River.

The reader should not get the notion I've laid it on rather thick concerning the Indians' drinking bouts. Henry's diary of happenings contains repeated mention of these carousals, attended with horrible maiming and brutal killing, all given with a certain bold-blooded matter of course air. My descriptions of these tragedies are toned down until, compared with the original facts, they seem like some peaceful parlor entertainment.

ESHKEBUGECOSHE, or Flat Mouth, chief of the Pillager Chippewas, was born in 1774 and died in 1860. He was of the Awausee gens, and as a youth travelled and fought much. He lived with the Crees and the Assiniboins, and visited the Missouri tribes in peace and war several times. For some time he lived with the Minnetarees (Hidatsa-Siouan). He was one of Henry's hunters, and while he does not figure at all prominently in the work, history records him as being highly respected both by red and white. He was early impressed by the prophecies of The Skwatawa the Shawnee prophet and twin brother of Tecumseh. He is credited with influencing the Pillagers and other Chippewa bands to cease their practise of poisoning. He refused British wampum belts in 1812. He led the fighting against the Siouan tribes in contesting the matter of ownership of the headquarters of the Mississippi. He was about thirty years old at the time of this story.

LE BORGNE (called by Brackenridge, "The One-Eyed") is similarly described by various early travelers. His perpetual smile was one of his characteristics. According to Brackenridge the woman he killed was the wife of a young warrior, whom he had appropriated and who had returned to her husband. Her mother went mad and pursued Le Borgne as I have described. Henry's account of it pictures her as a young wife unfaithful to him, and makes no mention of the insane woman.

Choke-Cherry, Le Borgne's brother, had three sons, and I mention but one, Chief of the Wolves. Henry bought a batch of white robes and one skin on the Red River in one trade. The calfskin was marked with black round the right eye.

For the sake of speeding up the action I have forced the coalition of the N. W. and the X. Y. companies a few months. The coalition was completed Nov. 5, 1804, and a Winter express brought word to Henry at the Pembina post Jan. 1, 1805. The combination was made possible by the death of Simon McTavish in July, 1804. Sir Alexander McKenzie, his implacable rival, now had no reason for not returning to the N. W. The new and stronger N. W. was absorbed by the H. B. in 1821.

The Indians I mentioned in the Red River part of the story were hunters for Henry. Black Cat and Big Man, at the lower Mandan villages, also were real characters. The legend of the Qu'Appelle was firmly believed in by Crees and Assiniboins.

Of course the Cheyenne River of the story is not to be confused with the Missouri's tributary of the same name.—HUGH PENDEXTER.

WHO knows about King John? It is Edgar Young asking and he has helped us out so many other times that I hope some of you can return the favor by giving some real facts on this interesting and perhaps mythical character.

I wonder if you could help me through the Camp-Fire in getting something definite about King John. I have heard of him all over South America, from Ecuador, Peru, Argentina and Brazil. According to current report he is a Spaniard, from Spain, who has made himself king of a large tribe of Indians somewhere on the eastern slope of the Andes, ruling them with an iron hand and forbidding entry to foreigners. I have heard so much that I am sure he is not a myth. What I want to know is: Who is this King John? Is he a Spaniard? Who was he in Spain? Why did he leave and how? And when? How did he get to be king? How do you get to his country? This is pure curiosity on my part and I am sure that some man will bob up who really knows something definite.—EDGAR YOUNG.

THE old Cossack, *Khlit*, has been a friend of ours for some time and now H. A. Lamb is introducing us to some new people whom I think you will also come to like. There are more of these tales to come and it may be that after a while *Khlit* may wander down and meet these new people himself. But not for quite a while.

Incidentally, how do you pronounce his name? I always sounded it as if it were spelled "Kleet," but Mr. Lamb tells me it should be pronounced with the "i" short—"Klitt." However, I've known him too long by the former sound and can't make the change comfortably.

A word from Mr. Lamb about these Moguls of the early seventeenth century:

New York.

Tales of *Abdul Dost* deal with the Moguls of India, in the early seventeenth century. Scene of "The Skull of Shirzad Mir" laid in northern hill country of Afghanistan.

AS FOR the skull in question. They were frequently made into drinking cups. A fashion of the time—to have an enemy chieftain's skull on exhibit, ornamented with gold or silver according to the wealth of the possessor.

There's a good deal of history in back of Abdul Dost's tales. Badakshan, home of *Shirzad Mir*, was the backbone of the Mogul kingdom before the great conquerors descended from the hills into

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Hindustan and central India. Once in India, the Moguls never returned to their homeland; but they had a great fondness for Kabul and Kashmir, showing it was from politic rather than personal reasons that they favored Delhi and Agra over the hills.

IN THE time of *Abdul Dost* Jahangir was on the throne of India, and Jahangir did not match up to his two great forebears, Baber and Akbar. It was the old story of the fighting conqueror whose descendants became palace figureheads and ruled through women and eunuchs.

Baber was a man's man, and his memoirs are an unbroken tale of fighting, mostly against odds. He won the respect even of his Rajput enemy, Rajah Sanga, who must have been an experienced judge of fighters as he was blinded in one eye, without one arm, lame and with eighty other battle scars. Baber enjoyed picking up two men and carrying them, leaping across the battlements of a rampart. In his own words, the year before he died:

"I swam across the Ganges for amusement. I counted my strokes and found that I swam over in thirty-three; then I took my breath and swam back. I had crossed by swimming every river I met except (until then) the Ganges."

Akbar also was a fine strain of man; and Jahangir displayed flashes of his heritage of courage, will and humor. The Mogul was absolute owner of most of the land within the empire, and when Jahangir took the throne there was a general rush on the part of the *amirs* and *begs* to register their claims. It was a case of first heard, best rewarded. Likewise, the powers at court were of mixed nationality —Rajputs, Persians, Afghans, Uzbeks and Turki-Mohammedans. The Mogul couldn't afford to play favorites. Shirzad Mir was late.

SIR RALPH WEYAND I have drawn from the historical John Mildenhall, or Midnall. Mildenhall sailed from London for Syria in 1599, bearing a letter from Queen Elizabeth to the Mogul. Left Aleppo 1600 for Kandahar. Received at court at Agra about three years later. Portuguese intrigue defeated his efforts to gain trade *firman*. The Portuguese were then firmly dug in at Goa and Surat. They had valuable trade rights, and their priests were in favor at court (owing to the Moguls' policy to countenance every creed).

Mildenhall suspected his interpreter—probably with reason—of a fondness for Portuguese gold, and determined that he must be able to speak Persian in person. Learned Persian in six months, escaped poisoning by his enemies, put some of said enemies out of action, returned to court and argued his own case. Said the Moguls had received little hard cash—although the satellites of the throne had got much—and won his trade concession. The first, I think, granted to an Englishman.

Mildenhall's second chapter doesn't make such good reading. He was, as the chronicle has it, in "an exceeding great rage" at his enemies; bartered his concesssion somehow for money; got together a fortune of $120,000 after returning to Persia; later, changed his religion, turned rogue, and disappeared.

In order to keep the Englishman of the Abdul Dost tales clear of this second chapter, I've rechristened him Sir Weyand and set him on his own; but his adventures follow closely the first part of Mildenhall's career.—H. A. LAMB.

ADVENTURE'S younger brother, *Romance*, will make its appearance October 11th. I don't brag much about our own magazine at Camp-Fire (at least I hope I don't) and I'm not going to brag about its companion magazine, but I want you to give *Romance* the once-over and form your own judgment.

Along with Joseph Conrad, Harris Dickson, Norval Richardson and others you'll find some of the old stand-bys of our own writers' brigade and still others who have appeared in our pages at some time or other. The first number happens to have our writers particularly well represented and, though they will not always be so much to the fore in *Romance*, there will always probably be some of these old friends in every issue. W. Townend, S. B. H. Hurst, Gordon Young and Charles Beadle have stories in the first issue, and others, like William H. Hamby, Eugene P. Lyle, Jr., and Patrick Casey, who have not appeared so regularly in our magazine of late.

A lot of you have been kicking because *Adventure* doesn't appear every week instead of twice a month and I've an idea that the monthly appearance of *Romance* will go a long way toward quieting that kick. Try out Vol. I, No. 1, and decide for yourself whether you are going to be one of the pioneer old-timers on *Romance* as so many of you are proud of being on *Adventure*.

And I'll be glad if you'll give me your honest, straight-from-the-shoulder judgment on *Romance* after you've seen it—stories, decorations, cover and all.

THE following is an extract out of a letter from one of our writers' brigade who has given us as red-blooded, two-fisted, man's stories as any we've ever had in our magazine. He himself has the same characteristics as his stories. Like a good many of the rest of us, he is done with formal religious creeds and dogmas, but knows there is a God and is groping to find Him.

As to the military aspects of the case, well, isn't he right? All credit to our men and officers alike, *but* you can't train either officer or enlisted man thoroughly in the time we tried to do it, even with the best material in the world to work on. It wasn't training that carried our troops to victory, though what training they had was a necessary factor. It was something in

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the men themselves, and neither training nor equipment nor anything else can be a substitute for it.

—but as I came to the evidence of what Faith can do and has done, I read Paul's words "—through faith subdued kingdoms . . . wrought righteousness. . . . out of the weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of aliens."! ! !·!

WAS ever a more colossal demonstration than the finish of the World War? America was the materialization of *faith in the might of right*—half-trained and half-led by half-trained officers those fresh-faced Yankee-Bohunk-and-what-not boys went over there chock-full of the subconscious conviction that the Hun was a foul thing to be expunged, saw the beast before them and just naturally went and *got* him. It's the universal testimony of all that veteran troops could never have put it over—would not have tried; but our polyglot doughboys didn't bother about possibilities or tactics, but with the sublime faith of fools and angels just naturally *did it!* Also it is the astounding truth that it was their glorious faith and pep that won the war—Morale! Call it what you will—war-stale Europe had run out of it—our boys were simply polluted with it, flooded those old fields, peopled with the ghosts of centuries of slaughters, with an inundation of the faith that is the essence of power, and God! Who knows what shining hosts marched with them through that stinking mud and wrought the World's Salvation?

I AM free to say that no sermons, no storied chronicles of miracles or monk-wrought spires have ever come so near to showing me the Light.

I don't know that I see it now, but I've had flashes, and am reverently thankful I am living in this age of mighty doings.

But where is our Paul, or Saul of Tarsus?

— —— —.

A WORD from Robert J. Pearsall concerning his story in this issue:

Berkeley, Calif.

The custom which furnished me with the idea upon which I really built "Silver Sycees"—that of politely forcing a dishonest magistrate to be his own executioner by sending him a "suicide cord"—originated with the Manchus, and really passed with them. Indeed, like a great many other of the old customs, it waned rapidly after the death of the Empress Dowager, Tsi'an, in 1910—possibly partly because she had been so prodigal in dispensing those unwelcome tokens of her regard. There's no reason some of the recipients shouldn't have chosen a getaway instead of death—and, as a matter of history, some did. Also I might say that the Taoist priesthood in China is, taken in general, very much as I've indicated. Of course, there are good priests and bad priests; but I suppose there's no greater fall in the history of religion than that of Taoism. However, it's an influence that the modern Chinese are throwing off fast; and it's only in the western provinces that the Taoist hierarchy are still able to build their power on superstition and ignorance.—ROBERT J. PEARSALL.

THERE has been such enthusiastic response to the suggestion of establishing Camp-Fire stations all over the world that there can be no doubt as to the popularity of the idea. Not a single dissenting voice.

After reading carefully all the letters offering plans and suggestions, I'm going to piece together the outline of a fairly complete plan and then wait for your opinions on it as a whole. Look it over and let me know how you feel about any or all of it.

ESTABLISH as many stations as possible, not only in this country and Canada but all over the world, and keep adding new ones as time goes on, until a wayfaring comrade can find at least one or two of them clear out to the edges of civilization—and maybe beyond. That sounds like a big undertaking, but it isn't.

In the first place a station is not an elaborate affair, costs almost nothing, needs almost no space. It serves these simple but useful purposes:

(1) A mail address for traveling comrades.
(2) A place for getting in touch with other Camp-Fire comrades who may be traveling the same district.
(3) A place for learning the names and addresses of resident Camp-Fire comrades who want to meet wayfaring members.
(4) A place to leave brief bits of information or warning concerning trails, local changes or conditions.
(5) A meeting-place to be designated in advance by comrades traveling different routes.
(6) A registration place where comrades can leave messages or put on record the date of their arrival and departure, destination, route and similar data for the information of friends or acquaintances following after, or for purposes of record only.
(7) An informal local meeting-place for resident members.

NOW see how little is required to make these things possible; a box for letters, a blank record and register book and a sign hung up in front.

Any reputable shop or office can serve as a station. Some of you have already offered your own homes. The owner of course is in all cases the judge of the extent

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to which his place shall be used, but must furnish a box for letters and have accessible the register book and any names of resident members left with him. That and ordinary courteous treatment and fair dealing are all that is required of him. In return, if he is a shop-keeper he is probably assured of a certain amount of trade he would not get otherwise. Tobacco shops, drug stores, book stores and, in some countries, reputable cafés would seem particularly adapted to the purpose.

One of you has suggested the Y. M. C. A. branches. In private homes the return would lie in meeting wayfaring members to the extent the owner desired. A station is not a lounging place and the owner is sole judge of the amount of hospitality to be extended. Printed rules, furnished by the magazine, could be posted to avoid misunderstandings.

THE sign and register can probably be supplied from this office, since the magazine would incidentally receive advertising through the station system and the house would therefore be justified in expenditure to make the system possible. The sign would be either the Camp-Fire "coat-of-arms" or the design of its button. If the house furnished them, the name of our magazine would also appear.

Stations open to any one who claims to be a member of Camp-Fire—and any one is a member who wishes to be. No one need be an "imposter." And there is nothing but the simple services above outlined that he can get out of it, neither the owner nor any other member being under any obligation whatever to do anything else for him or even to talk with him. Under no circumstances is any member of Camp-Fire obligated by the station system to do any more for another member than he is at present, which is none at all. It remains always a matter of individual choice, barring, of course, the mail and register services of the stations.

No responsibility is assumed by any one for the safety or correct delivery of mail or packages. It is assumed that no one will volunteer for a station unless sufficiently interested to take care of the light duties and that members will use their own judgment as to leaving things for delivery at their own risk.

The register is to be used for brief entries, not for essays or autobiographies. Either names or Identification-Card numbers could be signed.

IF POSSIBLE a simple bulletin-board should be maintained. Residents could post their addresses with a brief statement of the extent of the hospitality they cared to offer, what kinds of wayfarer they were particularly interested in, etc. The board would serve also for trail-notes, tips on local conditions, etc., the owner being free to decline any notice he pleased. Also, to state exactly what is, and what is not, offered by that particular station.

A station may range all the way from a place for a brief, businesslike call to a local club-room for resident and wayfaring members. Reading matter, for both information and amusement, could be left there. There is no end to the development possible if desired by the owner and other resident members. Each station in such matters is a law unto itself.

ANY one can volunteer to provide a station. As many stations in a town as desired. So far as possible a list of them would be published in the magazine; later a small booklet directory could be issued at cost price. Sufficient complaint from members would be ground for discontinuing a station and the discontinuance would be published. (The magazine could not and should not be judge in such cases except in so far as its own interests might be jeopardized; State or district secretaries or boards could perhaps be chosen.) Protection lies in the fact that there is small incentive for any one to assume the light duties of a station unless he is willing to meet them. Also, our wayfarers are not lambs it is easy to fleece or bulldoze. A pledge to accept unquestioningly a discontinuance and to turn in book, mail and sign would be exacted in the beginning.

There's the rough outline. Now come ahead with criticisms and suggestions. Nothing is settled yet and now is the time to say your say.

Meanwhile, all of you ready to offer a place for a station send in the name and address, subject to change of mind if the final plan does not suit you. Please state the general nature of the place offered and give a rough idea of the extent of service and hospitality that would be offered.

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It takes a good many words to present the case, but I think it is a simple one. And as easy as it is simple.

IN "PLAIN BLANKET INDIAN" you meet *Bull Judson* for the first time, but Mr. Pladwell arranged for your introduction in a story written before this one. Owing to the w. k. exigencies of laying out an issue, it happens that this later story reaches you first. Some day you'll read "A Teacher of Etiquette" and learn how *Bull Judson* first met up with Gila City. There were quite some doings on that occasion.

And now something as to Gila City itself:

Oakland, Calif.

I'd like to explain Gila City, since it has come to my memory that there is a town called Gila in western Arizona, some miles out of Yuma, and there is also a Gila Bend in central Arizona. It is needless to say, however, that neither of these towns is the city of marble and skyscrapers which appears in *Adventure*.

IT HAS been given me to travel extensively through the West. In this way I have seen many thriving cities and tried to learn their ways. The young Western city is a wonderful thing. You can think up a whole list—El Paso, Yuma, San Diego, Stockton, Fresno, Bakersfield and Reno among them—each a lively, forward-looking, happy, industrious commonwealth with a Board of Trade or a Chamber of Commerce to induce new settlers to share in their benefits, and a Real Estate Board to help them establish homes. They are as up-to-date as any Eastern city of four times the age. In fact, sometimes they are even up-to-dater. They are not bound by traditions.

And yet, among these modern communities, one can find traces of the old West, living alongside the new. It is a study in perpetual contrast.

It was not given me to know the old West, but I find I have learned somewhat the West in transition, with the old and new, perpetually in contrast, sometimes pitifully, sometimes ludicrously, and sometimes wonderfully. It has been therefore, my endeavor to write on things that I know about, and I have found this West as interesting and picturesque as the old must have been, and just as romantic.

I FIND this study in contrasts interesting. Perhaps it brings a new angle into things and persons already established in the public mind. To explain what I mean, take Geronimo, for instance. Here was the vilest old hellion that ever tortured a prisoner or burned a cabin—a grim figure of our Western history. When you think of Geronimo, you think of rifle-fire and bloood-lust and murder, a combination of brutality and picturesqueness.

And yet has it ever occured to any one that Geronimo, before his death and after he had languished in a Federal prison, paid his nickel to the street-car conductor, ate in a Dairy Lunch, put a coin in a phonograph and listened to the music, or skidded about in a taxi or fought with a laundryman because his shirt did not arrive on time? That is another Geronimo—and perhaps his actions in this environment were more interesting, more human, more pathetic, more ludicrous and perhaps more warlike than when he was burning ranches and shooting settlers.

AND so, in Gila City, I am attempting to bring out this new angle to the West, where the ultra-modern and the old-time customs flourish together, and where, perhaps, some old deputy sheriff tells of his gun-fight days to the operator of the wireless station on the site of what was once the sheriff's favorite saloon. The old West still flourishes as such, in places. Men still tote guns, in places. But forty miles from those places, wherever they are, there is probably an Automatic Lunch, a Movie Palace, and an agency for Ultra-plus Suits, made in Chicago and guaranteed to be much snappier than any tailored suit made.

I guess that explains Gila City. It is a symposium of El Paso, Yuma, Bakersfield, et al. In fact, a couple of Gila City stories are based on happenings in those communities. I did not wish to use the real towns because I have forgotten the details of the real towns and could easily be caught up on some misremembered street name or hotel or locality. Hence, Gila City.—E. S. PLADWELL.

MORE about snake-bites—a very interesting use of iodine, as both internal and external remedy. Not because I have any doubt that Mr. Major knows what he is talking about, but merely as a safe rule to follow in general, I want to make it clear that when opinions, recipes, remedies and suggestions are offered at Camp-Fire it does not mean that the magazine endorses them. We are gathered together to exchange opinions and ideas on things that interest us and when one of us talks *he* is talking, not the magazine. The magazine and its editor merely sit and listen like all the rest.

Mr. Major tells of a snake-bite remedy that sounds all right and his own sincerity is evidenced by his carrying iodine himself, but I take it he is merely offering his find for the benefit of Camp-Fire comrades and expecting them to use their own judgment in the matter. Probably it would be wise to get the O. K. of a good physician before trying any remedy in so vital a matter as snake-bite, though it must be borne in mind that most physicians will play safe by refusing to recommend anything of which they have not definite, personal knowledge. Can any of our physician comrades pass on this particular remedy?

Prescott, Arizona.

I have read with much interest the article on American venomous snakes and directions for the

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treatment of snake-bite and it occurred to me that a simple and easily used remedy might not be an unacceptable addition to what you have already given your readers.

SOME years ago I read an article stating that a doctor with many years' experience in India had successfully used iodine for the treatment of the bites of the cobra and other venomous serpents found there, and that the same thing had been found very effective in the treatment of rattlesnake bite. I copied it, and now, whenever I am in the field, I always carry a small bottle of a strong tincture of iodine, as well as permanganate of potassium crystals, strychnine and nitroglycerine in 1-100-grain pills. The strychnine and nitroglycerine are for the heart, as you are aware. Here is the application of the iodine:

Take internally seven drops of tincture of iodine on sugar. Repeat in one hour. It may be necessary to take more than only two doses. Scarify wound and bathe with a solution of iodine. A tourniquet to stop circulation and the pressing, or sucking, out the blood and contained poison, the same as would ordinarily be done, is also advised.

This is simple, is easily remembered and is easily taken.

The nitroglycerine is to stimulate the heart action the same as the strychnine. It may be taken in 1-50-grain doses at one or two hour intervals, as needed, then reduced.

Glad to see that Mr. Ditmars authoritatively corroborates my previous statement to you that your old friend G. M. is venomous. I have known that to be a fact without question.—CHAS. EDWARD MAJOR.

WILL some of the archeologists among us throw some light on this ancient village whose remains were found by Mr. Brown and his party?

And Mr. Brown adds something about Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid. There are many versions of the capture of the Kid but there is, I think, no doubt as to the fact of Garrett's death.

Chicago.

A number of years ago I was a member of a surveying party, running the lines for the Pecos Valley Railway in southern New Mexico. The Pecos River follows what is evidently an ancient riverbed, a flat-bottom valley ranging from one-half to five or six miles wide, bordered on each side with a mesa or highland fifty to one hundred feet above the valley.

ONE Sunday afternoon four or five of the members of the surveying party were exploring the country around the camp. Wandering along the edge of this mesa one of the boys stepped into a hole, and a hole in such a locality arousing our curiosity, we stopped to investigate it.

We found it to be a circular depression about two feet across and ten or twelve inches deep, with no opening in the bottom. This seemed very odd to us, so we pulled out the grass, dug out two or three inches of dirt and found that our depression was lined with round flint boulders about the size of your fist. In the bottom we found some small fragments of charcoal, from which we deduced that this had once been a fireplace. Still more interested, we cleaned the grass and dirt off around the fireplace and found that the ground for a space of about ten by twelve or fourteen feet around was also paved with the same kind of boulders and that at each corner and in the center on each side there was a sort of soft spot in the ground just outside of the paved space. Digging down into the soft spots fifteen or eighteen inches below the surface of the ground, we found small pieces of rotten wood but were unable to determine the variety. From this we concluded that at one time there had been six posts set up with some sort of a superstructure resting on them for a roof, and perhaps side walls attached.

AS THE soil in this section is a soft loam with a considerable proportion of gypsum mixed in, there are no stones or boulders to be found. Even along the Pecos River, which cuts straight down into this soft soil, you can go for miles without finding any stones. Later we searched the country for eight or ten miles around there without finding any boulders at all like those used for the paving.

Continuing our investigations, we found that there was a regular hamlet laid out there consisting of some twenty houses arranged about thirty feet apart, on each side of a central paved street, with a paved path leading from each house to the street.

There was no timber within fifty miles of this place that would be large enough to make the posts. We found a few imperfect arrow-heads and some small fragments of pottery but not a particle of wood nor any trace of the walls or roofs from which we believed that this village must have been built there one hundred or more years ago.

IN ONE of the recent issues, I read with interest an account of the life, adventures and death of "Billy the Kid."

I was quite well acquainted with Sheriff Pat Garrett, as I was in Lincoln County, New Mexico, while he was sheriff and on several occasions served as his deputy. I have heard from his own lips the account of his *pursuits* of Billy the Kid and of his final and successful raid and the manner in which Billy the Kid was killed, and my recollection of it does not agree at all with the account published.

Pat Garrett was appointed Collector of the Port of El Paso, Texas, by President Roosevelt and is, so far as I know, still living and I would suggest that you get his own account of the demise of "Billy the Kid."—H. W. BROWN.

FROM W. E. Carpenter, Inspector of Police Bureau, Montreal, comes an invitation to us, which, when I first read it, made me grin, thinking perhaps Inspector Carpenter was having his little joke on us. But on second thought I realized he was speaking, not as a member of the police, but merely as a man and Camp-Fire comrade. He wrote in for his Camp-Fire button. The remainder of his letter follows and, I, for one, will surely look him up if ever I

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get to Montreal, and hope he'll drop in on me if he strikes New York.

Montreal.

This also gives me an opportunity to extend an invitation to all members of the Camp-Fire to call on me any time that they happen to be in Montreal. I may state that Chicago is my home, but have been here since November, 1916, joining the police force a few months later. Will be pleased to have any member call on me, and especially Chicago ones. I was on the beat for a short while, but for the past two years I am in the Inspectors Bureau from 9 A.M. till 5 P.M., where I can be seen any time, and if preferred, they can call up Main 3500 on their arrival, and I will be pleased to meet them any place.—W. E. CARPENTER.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

AS ALREADY stated, I do not agree with Mr. Harold's statement that we Americans have "rejected plutocracy." That phrase may mean a number of things, but if he means that, taking us as a whole, the dollar is not still our chief measure of value, then I think he is mistaken. The fundamental trouble with this country is materialism, the dollar being its natural medium of expression. And the materialistic Socialists and the materialistic Bolshevists are trying to sink us still deeper in materialism.

A PIECE of iron, a bushel of grain, a dollar are to most Americans only iron, grain and a dollar. They can not see that these things are nothing in themselves, can be good or bad only according to the uses to which they are put and that these uses are determined solely and always by the spirit, attitude, ideals of the users. These things are valuable and necessary. Americans can see that much, can even see that the manner of their use is what creates and determines their value. But, seeing no more than this, when they try to better conditions they spend all their thinking in devising systems of using. Most of them are utterly blind to the fact that no system of use, no materialistic plan, can be worth anything or accomplish anything except as it is created and directed by an ideal.

The determining factor is the ideal. The only way you can get a change is by changing the ideal. The only force that can ever accomplish anything is an ideal. A people's future is determined solely by their ideals. To shape their future, shape their ideals. And if you do shape their ideals, you can laugh at the dull-witted fools who strive in other directions by attempting to change material conditions while they ignore what alone controls all material conditions.

BOLSHEVISTS and other materialists have what they call ideals, but these are not ideals; merely selections from the formulas of materialism. And neither their formulas nor the present ones under which we live nor any others are worth a sou except as ideals may make them valuable.

You can not build a sound house out of rotten bricks, nor a good government out of bad citizens. You can not make good citizens unless you instil into them good ideals. If you want a good democracy you must make good democratic citizens. If you want good democratic citizens you must instil into them a good ideal of democracy. And the ideal of democracy, as it has already been defined for us, comes pretty close to being the Golden Rule—the Golden Rule expressed in terms of serving the people before yourself.

BUT if you present that idea to a specialist in economics and sociology, whether he is an ignoramus bawling from a soap-box or a college professor purring mock-wisdom from his desk, he hoots in derision. It is too large an idea for the first, too simple an idea for the second. One has never reached common sense; the other has passed it by. For each is trying to control an engine by sticking his fingers in the fly-wheel instead of putting them upon the throttle.

The one thing we need in this country is a clear, clean ideal of real democracy. The only place that or any other ideal can be is in the minds of the people. The only way to get it there is to put it there. The only way to put it there is by definite organized effort. The only way to bring that effort into operation is to—*act.*

And there is no one to do the acting except us ourselves.

A. S. H.

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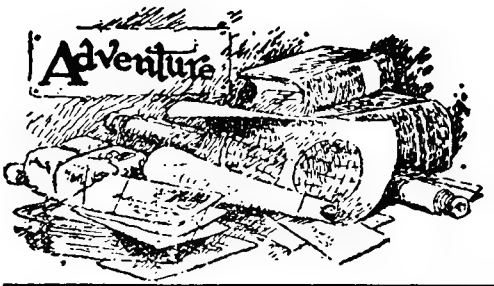

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL BUY: First June, Mid-June, 1916. Twenty cents per copy, postage prepaid.—MAX FORET, 5 Inselstrasse, Tivoli, Strasburg, Alsace, France.

WILL BUY: April, 1911 to Sept., 1911. Fifty cents each not including postage.—Address CAPTAIN E. ROMMELL, Am. C., Camp Hill Hospital, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

WILL SELL: June, 1915; Sept. to Dec., 1915 (inclusive); all 1916 and 1917 except July. 20 cents each, or 75 cents for all 1915 issues. $1.75 for 1916. 10 cents each for 1917 issues or $2.00 for lot.—E. W. LOVERING, Northampton, Mass.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn in lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1833 S St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1309 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, P. O. Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

10. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1
J. B. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

11. Mexico Part 2 Southern
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

12. North American Snow Countries Part 1
R. S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin. Hunting, fishing, trapping. Canoes and snowshoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached)*
Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 3
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering south-eastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 4
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 6
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries. Part 7
H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

20. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

21. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

22. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, The Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

23. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

24. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, Box 807A.—R. F. D. No. 10, Los Angeles, California. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports, manufacturing.

25. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

26. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

27. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Eagle Bird Mine, Washington, Nevada Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

28. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

29. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate,' opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

30. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, 7 Place de Tertre, Paris, XVIII, France. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

31. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

32. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shot-guns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shot-Guns (including foreign and American makes.) J. B. THOMPSON, Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Major A. M. Lochwitzky.

Russia of Today

HERE is an American who wants to join those intrepid forces under Kolchak, that still are struggling against the anarchy of bolshevism. He wants to fight Lenine & Co. so badly, he's willing to travel 15,000 miles *on his nerve* to get at them! Major Lochwitzky, formerly a colonel in the Imperial Russian Army, tells him how to do it:

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Question:—"I'm going to go via Japan to Russia, if it's possible for an American to join the Russian Army when I get there.

"As I will have to travel for the greater part on my nerve, I will greatly appreciate any information you may see fit to give in regards to customs of the Russians and anything that will help me along."—MITCHELL WATSON, Mercedes, Texas.

Answer, by Major Lochwitzky:—Am sorry that you did not give me more particulars as to your education, the languages you speak, whether you have any military training, etc., without which facts it is impossible for me to answer correctly your inquiry, addressed to me as editor of the Russian Department of "Ask Adventure."

Of course you know that Siberia, a territory 6,000 miles broad and 2,500 from north to south, is under the Provisional President, or Dictator, Admiral Kolchak, whose troops, together with our brave allies, the Czecho-Slovaks, are fighting Trotzki (whose real name is Braunstein) and Lenine, who virtually occupy most of European Russia.

Now, if you don't speak the Russian or French languages, in my opinion it will be impossible for you, or anybody else similarly situated, to secure a commission or even be accepted as a volunteer, unless you had large means at your disposal and could afford an interpreter.

Do not forget that out of 180 millions of Russian subjects, there are only two per cent. of 120 millions (the 60 millions of the nobility, merchants and officials can read, write and speak not only their native tongue, but usually French or German), who can read and write *Russian only.* One can not advertise in the newspapers or through handbills for employment, etc.

Everything is so upset in Russia that it is hard to say whether you would need a passport from the State Department, vised by the Russian Embassy at Washington, or not. I believe that it would be best to secure one.

In your place I would write to the U. S. Consul, Vladivostock, Siberia, Russia (Mr. John K. Caldwell was there in the past year and I have had no information of any change). If you get an answer from him, will you kindly send me a copy of his letter to you; as formerly I was a Lieutenant-Colonel of the Imperial Russian Army and my late father was Lieutenant-General and one of the Ass'ts of the Minister of War of Russia. So it may be that I still can help you with letters of introduction, but they would serve you to no good purpose in *some* localities.

The Real Florida

IT ISN'T all a paradise. And you should divide by eight those stories real estate men peddle in their glowing pamphlets. Its hunting and fishing are, perhaps, matchless; its farms marvels of fruit and garden. But! There's a story of hard work and many failures behind it all:

Question:—"Will you kindly give me the following information about Florida?

"1—Is outdoor work plentiful, and are wages comparatively good. Is there a best time of year for work?

"2—Is the land of Keystone Park, Pinellas Co., favorable?

"3—Would it be possible to settle on ten acres uncleared land in this part (Keystone) by clearing one or two acres at a time, cultivating and producing and live as you go? Could cost of living be materially reduced by fishing and shooting?

"Would two or three strong fellows have an advantage as compared to one alone?

"According to real estate folders, small farms are cheap and advantages great! Why are so many farms for sale cheap? Just what are some of the disadvantages? Are there any solid reasons why more people don't settle in Florida?

"Are all kinds of farming really profitable? Is a year or so of experience really necessary for same, or at least truck?

"In addition, if you can refer me to any literature pertinent to the subject, I should be greatly obliged."—JOHN BOURNE, Paris, Ontario, Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—To answer your questions:

1—Outdoor work can be had, ordinarily, and wages are usually pretty good. The best time of year for work is the Winter, in the orange-picking and packing season. The citrus fruit industry is the big industry here.

2—Confidentially, I can not highly recommend land in the Pinellas Peninsula. It would probably be hard to clear. It costs as much as one hundred dollars per acre to get the scrub palmetto, etc., off some of this Florida land. The water in Pinellas is apt to be hard and unpalatable. I have no kick on Pinellas, you understand; I am only telling you the truth as it appears to me. The land around Bartow is better, and cabbages are grown by the million there. Better also is the land around Sanford, where they grow carloads of celery and lettuce. The territory around Hastings also is better, Irish potatoes being the big crop. Ocala is in a region that is called good for general farming. The water in Florida, by the way, is not likely to be as good as you're used to; usually it is either hard or sulphurous. Some towns, however, have filtered supplies that are all right.

3—It might be possible to settle on ten acres and live on it, clearing it as one had time to give to clearing it, but it would be a "hard row to hoe." Cost of living could be reduced by fishing; as to hunting, a non-resident's license costs fifteen dollars here. When you have been here six months, however, you could get a hunting license for two dollars. There is splendid shooting and fishing in Florida. One drawback to hunting in the scrub is snakes. Many hunters wear snake-proof leggings. Two or three strong fellows would doubtless have an advantage over one alone, in the matter of vegetable-growing or farming.

You can hardly believe everything real estate folders tell you. So many small farms are for sale cheap because their owners want to quit them, maybe! The disadvantages, in part, are that much of the land has to be irrigated in dry seasons, and nearly all of it has to be fertilized. Even citrus fruit trees are fertilized. In here, perhaps, are some of the "solid" reasons why more people do not settle in Florida. Florida is magnificent for its climate, its fishing, and its hunting; it deserves great credit for its fruits; but much of its land is desert-poor. Real estate here is a gamble.

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A year of experience is really necessary for almost anything in Florida. The best bet I know for a man with small means is to buy ten acres of orange land (he should be sure it *is* orange land), clear it, plant it and care for it until the trees are five years old, and then sell it. It should be located well.

I can not refer you to any literature save that of land companies, etc., which you already have, I take it. After all, there is but one thing for you to do, and that is to see Florida for yourself. Sometimes I think no two people ever saw Florida just alike. Why not come in November, work your way through the Winter, and get acquainted? That's the way I'd do it, if I were you. You'll see many interesting things, all right. Then if you want to stay, you can stay.

Big Game in Burma

DO YOU wish the best spot for big game hunting in the world? Mr. McCreagh, a famous hunter, author of books on the subject, tells why Burma is that spot. It's a place where one can hunt de luxe with little lack of comfort and at moderate expense:

Question:—"A friend and myself expect to take a six months' hunting trip to India, as soon as we are mustered out of the service, and I am writing to ask for any information you may be able to give us.

"a. When would be the best time of the year to start on a trip of this kind?

"b. What would a trip of this nature cost for two men?

"c. What would be the cost including porters, guides, arms, provisions, etc.?

"d. What kind of firearms would you recommend?

"e. Which affords the best hunting ground, India or Burma?

"f. What would the license cost for two hunters?

"Also would appreciate any information you can give us regarding our chances for employment in India. If we find something to do that suits us we may remain there some time after our hunting trip is completed. We are not very particular what kind of work we get but, if possible, would like to get work where there are other Americans employed.

"We are both about the same age, twenty-five; play baseball and soccer, also basketball; and both of us have qualified as expert riflemen."—J. A. SHORT, Lexington, Kentucky.

Answer, by Mr. McCreagh:—It gives me real pleasure to answer the questions you ask about a hunting trip to India, or Burma. Particularly the latter; for in my opinion the latter so far outranks India in variety of game and conditions of hunting that I am going to apply all my answers to Burma. You can figure about the same for India, only not nearly so good.

a. As to time. All that you really have to consider is to dodge the rainy season and the breeding season. If, then, you get there by about October you will have five months of good shooting weather, as weather goes in the Far East. Under ordinary conditions allow yourself a month to get on to your ground.

b. & c. This is going to be a good deal less, I fancy, than you are perhaps figuring on. For hunting in Burma and India is not like African work. You don't have to engage a vast and expensive *safari* and disappear for two or three months. Railroads cover the country sufficiently to take you to within a couple of days of your ground.

Your staff need not consist of more than a personal valet, or "boy-of-all-work," for the two of you, and a cook. Being foreigners, you will probably have to pay each of these as much as eight dollars apiece per month. You would hire these robbers at Rangoon and take them with you. They will be Madrassi boys, and will speak English, and will most likely be Christians. They will surely lie, and will most certainly steal. But since you are forewarned you will be careful.

Arrived at your ground your boys would make arrangements for a couple of bullock carts to carry your duffle, and yourselves, if you wish; though, since they have no springs and the roads are nearly as bad as Broadway, you will prefer to ride. Bullock carts will cost one rupee (thirty-three cents) a day each. Horses and saddles can be hired locally; but it is better to take your own saddle, purchased in Rangoon. Cost of horse with attendant *sais* will be about a dollar a day. You will also hire locally a local *shikari*, or hunter, who will take you where the game is. He will be tickled to get a dollar a day.

My advice always is to buy no equipment here. You can get everything you will need in Rangoon cheaper, and in most cases better, than here. This includes guns. You will find in any of the local sporting goods stores a man who will be able to give you good straight advice about everything you need, including information about good districts for hunting.

d. Firearms. It is frightfully difficult to advise another fellow about his battery. Guns are a matter of individual crankiness. All I can tell you is that you must have a rifle of good hitting power, not smaller than .30 calibre; and a shotgun of standard twelve gauge, or "bore" as they call it there. Personally I would take a Ross Rifle and a Greener gun; but that is only my particular craziness. I would advise you to leave the matter of guns also till you get to Rangoon. The local gunsmiths have a wide range of British built guns which you will find every bit as good as our own makes; and there is no need for you to pay the customs duty on importation of firearms.

e. I have covered already. And I have given you the real and only efficient way of doing the thing. You can spend a great deal more money if you are willing to let yourself get stung. You may be tempted to various extravagances; but what I have told you is perfectly practicable. It is the way I always did the thing myself. Incidentally you can read up a darn good book on the subject. It is entitled "Big Game in the Shan States." You will find a copy in the museum library, unless it has been stolen on account of its extreme value. I know all about this because I wrote it myself.

f. There ain't no license necessary. At least there wasn't before the war. God knows what taxation they may have stuck on. Regarding employment, all I can say is that the chances are small. Generally speaking, white help is not hired locally anywhere in all the Far East. Employers prefer to have their home offices in Europe do the hiring and send the men out on contract. With very few exceptions, then, there are no jobs to be picked up in

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India or Burma. However, you will be able to see for yourself. And my betting is that after you have been in the country for a few months you will decide that, while it may be a good country to visit, it is no place for a white man to want to live in. Me, I wouldn't go back there on a permanent job for all the money in the mint.

In Burma you may get a chance for a few games of baseball. For there are two extensive oil fields at Yenangyat and Yenangyaung, on the Irrawady River. They are run by Americans, and each have a ball team. And Tom Sharpe, the Yenengyat catcher, will tell you more lies about shooting wild things than any guide out of Maine.

I guess that's about all. Except, perhaps, you don't have to worry about going wrong to any extent. Wherever you get off the train you will find one or two local white men who will go to all sorts of trouble to put you up to the latest dope on everything.

Homesteads in British Columbia

THERE are millions of good acres still open to homsteaders in Canada. Who wants them? Mr. Carson gives a brief description of the more promising territories and tells you how further information may be procured:

Question:—"Would be pleased to hear from you in regard to homesteads in British Columbia. My husband and I would like to get one and would appreciate any information that you may send us." —MRS. H. E. HEMNES, Sioux City, Ia.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—There are still several million acres of agricultural land open for homesteading in British Columbia, covering a range of territory that gives one a choice of almost any sort of climate.

On the coast and Vancouver Island the climate is semi-tropical, plenty of rain, little frost, scarcely any snow all Winter (sometimes none at all), but this carries with it the inevitable natural growth that spells heavy clearing. If you can do so, however, it certainly pays in the end.

In the Ootsa Lake country they have three months of comparatively mild Winter, snow enough for sleighing, light clearing or even open meadows,a very fertile soil and a district that promises to be a wonder as a fruit country when the railways get in.

The Cariboo and Prince George districts are dry, with cold Winters and hot Summers, but excellent for stock raising if one gets a claim along a stream.

The Peace River Block gets one into a Dakota climate minus the blizzard, excellent stock and grain countries with good hunting and fishing on the side.

This practically covers the province, as the outlying territories are not yet opened nor are they liable to be for some time; but speaking generally there are excellent opportunities for the homesteader in British Columbia.

Write the Deputy Minister of Lands, Victoria, British Columbia, for maps and information concerning any of the above districts which seem to look best to you, or ask him to send you literature covering all of them if you feel that way. This information is issued by the Government free of charge, and is reliable.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

NANCE, I. V. Last heard from in Butte, Mont. Carpenter by profession. Any one knowing of his whereabouts please write.—Adress J. W. HILL, Lordsburg, New Mexico.

GLAUMAN, AL. Please write to your friend. Would be very thankful if any one knowing his whereabouts would let me know. He was in Detroit in 1917 and 1918.—Address AL PUCHER, 114 Chambers St., Milwaukee, Wisc.

MORAN, THOMAS also MICHAEL MORAN. Lived in Garrick Street, New York City, about thirty-two years ago. Any information concerning either or both will be appreciated.—Address MRS. MARY A. (FLYNN) FROGGETT, 8 Union Place, Worcester, Mass.

GIBBS, RICHARD H. Called "Acronaut" Gibbs. Last heard of in April 1918, as he was leaving Manilla for the United States. Any information will be appreciated. —Address DONALD S. ROOT, 29 Nelson Ave., Cooperstown, N. Y.

TEXAS, "SLIM." Please communicate with your old shipmate. Saw you last in Lorain, Ohio.—Address ALBERT WILLIAMS, 435½ Tennessee Ave. N. E., Washington, D. C.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

SOUTH AFRICANS. Would like to get in touch with South Africans. I was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, and have been in America for the past eight years. Would like to renew old acquaintances.—Address THEO BEHR, 6408 Gates Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

KNOX, MRS. R. Last heard of at 23 Shutter St., Toronto, Canada, in December 1918. Also son, BILL KNOX, piano-player, last heard of in Victoria, B. C., five years ago. Son Bob just back from France.—Any information will be appreciated.—Address No. 10593, care of *Adventure*.

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RUBENSTEN, MEYER. "Ruby". Alias Harry Butler. Worked with Philip Shaw in lumber camp about November 15, 1918. Philip Shaw was my buddie, cow-punching in Texas during years 1915-1916. Now deceased. Any information will be appreciated.—Address PVT. J. SHEEHAN, Co. G. 22 Inf., Ft. Niagara, N. Y.

SMITH, "BANTAM RED". Last heard of in vicinity of Grand Junction, Colo., in 1914. Is gambler and pugilist. Age about twenty-six or twenty-seven, auburn hair, blue eyes, and scarred face. Any friends seeing this please get word to him that Garcia is dead. Warrant canceled.—Address HENRY HARDEN, Wichita, Kansas.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

CROSSEY, WM. Five feet, eight inches tall, blue eyes, brown hair. Last heard of in Denver, Colo., 1892. Was a waiter there. Has relatives in St. Louis, but they can not be located. Any information concerning him will be appreciated by his daughter.—Address MRS. THERESA BARGER, 107 West 46th St., New York, N. Y.

BECK, MRS. BESSIE. Daughter. Maiden name Erickson. Last seen in Bisbee, Arizona, two years ago. Supposed to have gone to Miama, Arizona. Light brown hair, blue eyes, rather tall and slim. Her father is dead, and she has money coming to her. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. CARRIE ERICKSON, Prescott, Arizona.

MEYER, LIDIA also GOTLIEB MEYER. Born in Minitsdorf, Germany. Came to America in 1893, when eleven years old. Stayed with her brother at Winona, Minn., for a few years. Your sister, Mary Obst, has aked me to try and locate you. Any information will be gratefully received.—Address AL PUCHER, 114 Chambers St., Milwaukee, Wisc.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

KADE, RAY T. Dad knows all; says your troubles are imaginary not serious. He wishes you had confided in him as he asked you to. More worried about your whereabouts than your trouble, will help you and forgives you. You are making a mountain out of a mole-hill. We won't forget you; we love you just the same and will help you to happiness, so don't worry, but write Dad. We all make mistakes.—CARL.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First October or Mid-October issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

ALELIUNAS, ALEX; Atkins, Warren; Bartlett, Geo. H.; Biechele, Harry; Clayton, Frank; Cooke, Harry Malcolm; Echols, Lon; Farley, "Rush"; Fioch, Forrest Thurman; Gale, David J.; Gaskill, L. B.; Joynt, Harry; Kelly, Robert E.; Law, Francis Gordon; Lockwood, Charles N.; McGrath, Pvt. Thos. Edward; Nucles, Fritz; Ohlson, O. S.; Roycroft, Lloyd C.; Roycroft, Sidney Lynn; Rutherford, Wm.; Sims, Elsworth; Stiner, N. G.; Sweeck, Joseph E.; VanWassel, Charly; Whitworth, "Billy"; Willman, Wm. J.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; G. H. Bennett; Bryon Chrisholm; Wm. S. Hilles; A. B. Paradis; E. E. S. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; J. P. Goggins.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity:

ARNOLD, TED; Aspinartos, A.; Brady, Grover C.; Brison, Clarence F.; Bishop, L. O.; Benson, E. W.; Babcock, Lucius A.; Beaton, G. M.; Carr, Mrs. Fred; Cosby, Arthur F.; Collins, John; Coles, Bobby; Campbell, Frank U.; Dorr, H. S.; Engelby, B.; Erwin, Philbert; Garson, Ed.; Geers, Mrs.; Harvey, Ted; Hines, Joseph; Harris, Walter J.; J. C. H.; Hart, Jack; Harding, James; Harrison, Tillson L.; Hunt, Dan'l O'Connel; Johnson, Walter R.; Kelly, Charles Lester; Kuckaby, William; Kohn, Edward; Lee, Wm. R.; Lofler, Mrs. Harry; Leighton, Capt.; Larisy, Jack; Lee, C.; "Lonely Jock"; MacDonald, Donald Carr; MacDonald, Tony; MacMahon, J. A.; Macnamee, Alva I.; Miller, B. J.; Morrisy, K. A.; McCord, P. A.; Maples, C. M.; McGraw, John; Nelson, Frank Lovell; Nichols, Leon; Richards, Lewis S.; Reid, Raymond; Rodgers, Stewart; Reed, H. W.; Schmidt, Walter; Scott, James F.; Seaman, W. E.; Shephard, H. O.; Stanley, Jack; Swan, George; Taylor, Jim; Von Gelucke, Byron; Wetherell, Delos E.; Williams, Bertram I.; Williams, Ray; Williams, W. P.; Western, S. S.; Yelton, Roy T.; Young, Leon.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you. —Address E. F. BRACE, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MID-NOVEMBER ADVENTURE

Ten fascinating stories of life in as many different parts of the world come to you with the next issue. Two of them are described on page two.

AN ANGEL WITH A TIGER'S SOUL — *By S. B. H. Hurst*
Even the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in India is made a mere toy by this daring, alluring woman.

INSIDE INFORMATION — *By W. C. Tuttle*
Three citizens there are with the name of Jones in Piperock—moreover they all possess the same initials—A. C.; and *Wick Smith*, the postmaster, has his hands and ears full when he tries to deliver a letter addressed to A. C. Jones.

FAY'S TRADE MARK — *By Norman Springer*
No wonder the visitor is surprised, for in an ornate gold frame in *Mrs. Fay's* scrupulously clean parlor rests an iron wrench.

TUB O' LARD — *By Thomas McMorrow*
Showing the method by which a commissioner of police in France solves a seemingly impenetrable murder mystery.

THE NO GOOD GUY — *By Edgar Young*
They were treated rough—these no good guys—at the Zone in the days when the Panama Canal was in the making.

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE — *By Roy P. Churchill*
Selfish he was, this old sailorman, selfish and self-centered. Then came a situation in which the question of his selfishness meant life or death to his shipmates.

MASTERY — *By Robert J. Pearsall*
For five years *Craxton* kept straight and followed the narrow path, that the inhabitants of this little Western town might trust him enough so that he could make a big haul—a clean-up.

GENTLEMEN OF THE NORTH Part II — *By Hugh Pendexter*
The manager of the North West fur-trading post finds himself pitted against a medicine-woman in his struggle to obtain skins from the Indians.

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YOU MEN —LISTEN! The country needs more trained, graduate electricians. Thousands have gone into the Government service and there is such an unusual demand for competent electrical men that I am making a wonderful offer at this time. **Here Is Your Opportunity!** I want to send you my splendid offer now.

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